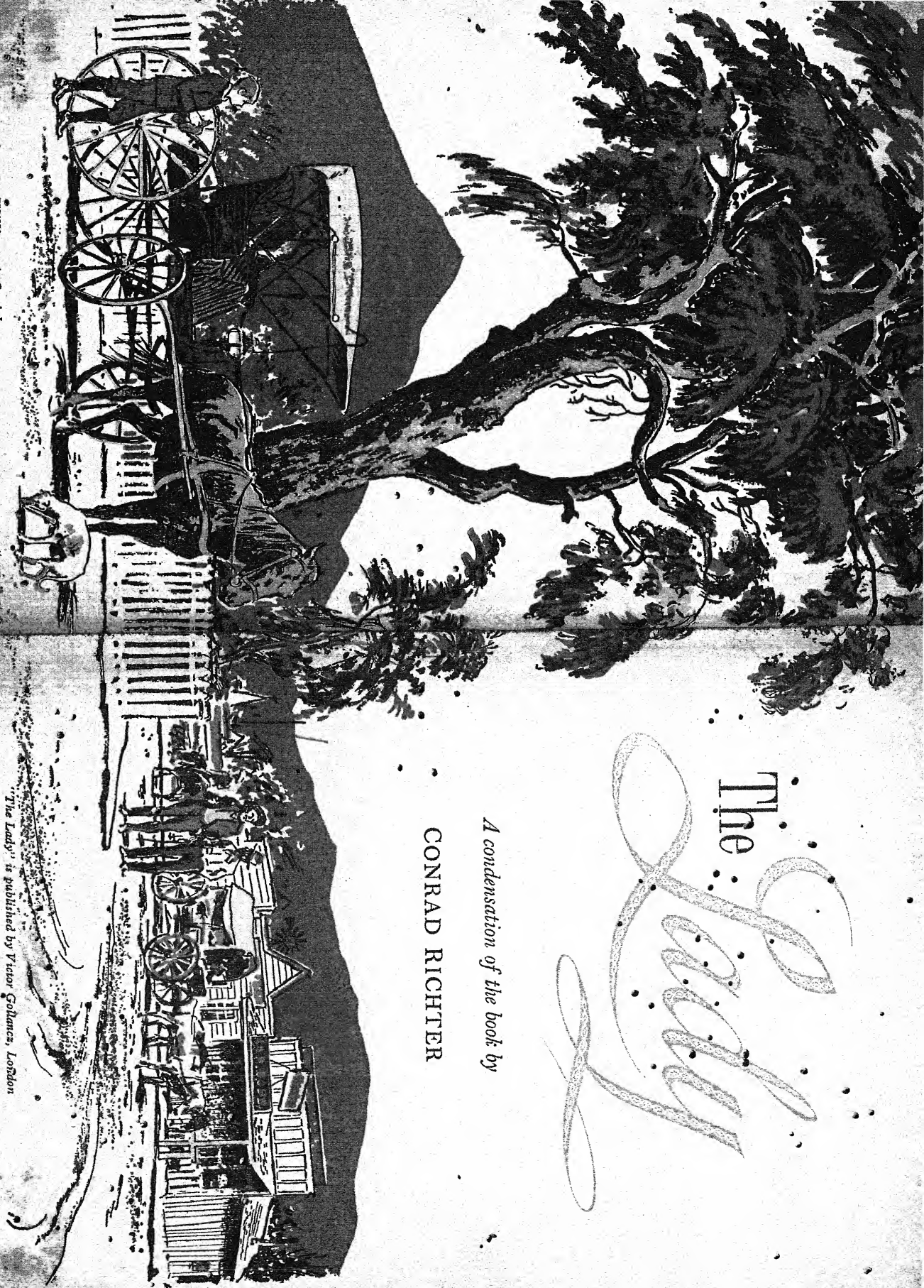


# The Lady

*A condensation of the book by*

CONRAD RICHTER

Illustrations by William A. Smith



"The Lady" is published by Victor Gollancz, London

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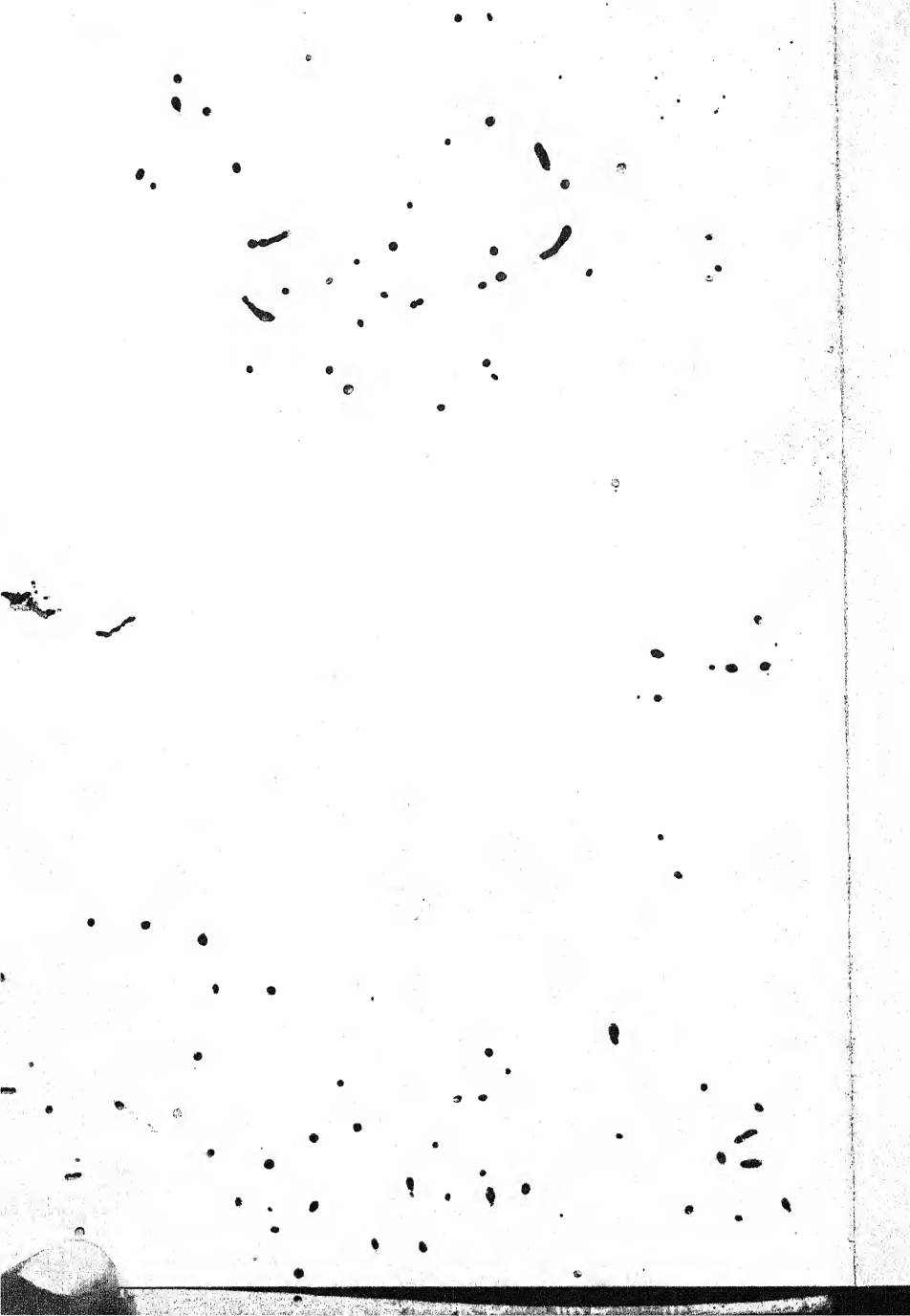
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*By Kenneth Roberts*

PUBLISHED BY COLLINS





IN THE New Mexico of seventy years ago Doña Ellen Sessions held an enviable position: she had wealth, beauty, a devoted and distinguished husband. But Doña Ellen was Anglo-Spanish, and her tumultuous Latin emotions often overwhelmed her cool English control. A paradox of weakness and strength, she wielded her power effortlessly, conquering by charm all men but one—her brother-in-law and deadly enemy.

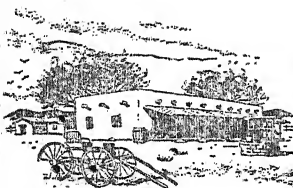
Through the appealing character of an orphan boy under her protection, Conrad Richter tells the gripping story of a courageous woman's struggle with a man bent on destroying her—the story of a great lady.

"A taut, gripping story, beautifully written. . . . It is a joy to read."

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"Beautifully visualised and splendidly described."—Vernon Fane in *The Sphere*

## CHAPTER 1



WOULD never believe that my father had run away with the money.

Oh, I knew well enough what the people of Moro were saying: that no one really knew anything about us but Judge Sessions and he had known only my mother; that my father was too fancy a dresser to be an honest "commission boy"; that he used to pay attention to a questionable woman who less than a month before had left the country, and that they were probably together somewhere in Colorado now.

It was a barefaced lie, I told anyone who spoke it in my hearing. I said he had gone to the woman only to learn Spanish, which he needed at the commission house. I said many other things to his credit, and not a word of the thing I knew he had failed to do: bring my mother West from Missouri when they found she had lung fever. She had wanted to come. The malady ran in the family. Her cousin Albert Sessions had been expected to die of it, but he had gone to New Mexico territory, had married into a wealthy Spanish family, and was now a judge for three or four counties.

I can still hear my mother tell my father that, if she got away from the steamy air of the Missouri, she would be well again. But he had

breathed the air of the Missouri all his life, he told her, and it hadn't hurt him. Only after her death did he give up the house and hunt up my mother's cousin in New Mexico. He said he did it for me, to save me from the weak lungs of my family, but I rather thought it remorse.

However, many men fail their wives without failing their employers. My father wasn't the sort to do both. I have his photograph now, yellow with age. It's hard to believe that he was only twenty-nine years old. He looks forty, a fine figure of a man with a soft brown moustache. He carried himself straight in his well-cut clothes, and his eyes looked out at you steadily. Never, I felt, would he have abandoned me in a place like Moro, a thousand miles from Missouri, and it wasn't in him to have gone off with so little fuss, saying he was just driving up to the vicinity of the Greenhorn Mountains, yet knowing all the time that he was deserting me for good. He didn't even raise the whip or look back as he drove off in one of the rigs from Caldwell's Livery Stable. I stood watching his dust till buckboard and white-footed bay horse were lost in the blurred horizon.

Only one thing troubled me. Why hadn't he let me go with him? I was crazy to go with him and had begged him to take me. He had the room and packed nothing more than a sack or two of oats that I could see. But he said no, he couldn't, and wouldn't tell why.

Later on we knew that old Boreas Luna had sent two of his Mexicans down to the commission house for cash to buy another flock of sheep, that Mr. Kidd hadn't trusted the money to them, and so had sent it special with my father, in gold eagles and a few silver dollars, all done up in sacking, sewed compactly, and hidden at the bottom of the oats. There were different accounts of the amount going around. Some said six thousand dollars and some swore it was eleven.

Almost every day after that I went down to the commission house to see if my father had come back. On my way I passed Caldwell's Livery Stable. Most of the rigs were kept outside and the horses in a corral. A long way off I could see that the bay with white feet wasn't there. That didn't prove anything, I told myself stoutly. My father and his horse might both be down at the commission house.

The sign on the commission house read: KIDD & Co., *Forwarding and Commission Merchants*. The largest building held the offices,

among other things, and the first thing I looked for was my father's desk. As a rule, ledgers and day-books lay open together with bills of lading, all held down by lumps-of-ore paper-weights. But now the desk had a bare emptiness that gave me suddenly a sick feeling. I went on to where I used to find my father sometimes, in the dark warehouse aisles smelling of tea and green coffee, of dyes from the bales of gingham and calicoes, of rope and saddles, of bacon and lard, of the cold metallic smell of hardware, the good sharp scent of tobacco and the strong chemical odour of sheep-dip.

He wasn't there, nor on the great splintery platforms where goods wagons and pack-trains were loaded, so I went to the feed warehouse, which I liked best. Here were walls of flour piled in sacks and barrels, and bins of corn, barley and oats. Only the feedhouse men were there. I went on to the last of the warehouses, piled to the roof with hides and greasy fleeces. It was the custom then to send the fleeces out to the scouring mills, and when the wool came back it was light and fluffy. Often had I jumped into the huge bins and rolled about in the soft drifts, but today I only looked into the dark hot cavern and then went back to the office to try to find out when my father was coming.

The men had always been very friendly. Now they hardly let on that I was there. Only Mr. Kidd would actually look at me. He was a thick, bald-headed man with black moustache and eyebrows, and when he caught sight of me he'd bark low and short to Mr. Younger. After a while Mr. Younger would come over to me. "How are you today, Jud?" he'd say, and his hard-bitten face would give me a smile.

"Is he back?" I'd ask, quick hope from his cheerfulness rising in me.

"Not yet. At least not so far as I know," he'd say as if to make my father's absence less final and to hold out a hope of him still coming, although all of them knew then that old Boreas had sent word he had seen neither the money nor my father.

I'd stand for a little while, digesting the disappointment and getting hold of myself. "Could you use a boy today?" I'd ask him.

"Not just today," he'd say thoughtfully and no hint that they wouldn't hire or trust the son of a man who ran off with eleven thousand dollars, just regret that there was no opening, and the door left open for tomorrow.



I don't know how long this might have gone on if one day I hadn't come in and found a new man at my father's desk. I knew then, despite what Mr. Younger implied, they never expected to see my father back, and for a long time I didn't go in again.

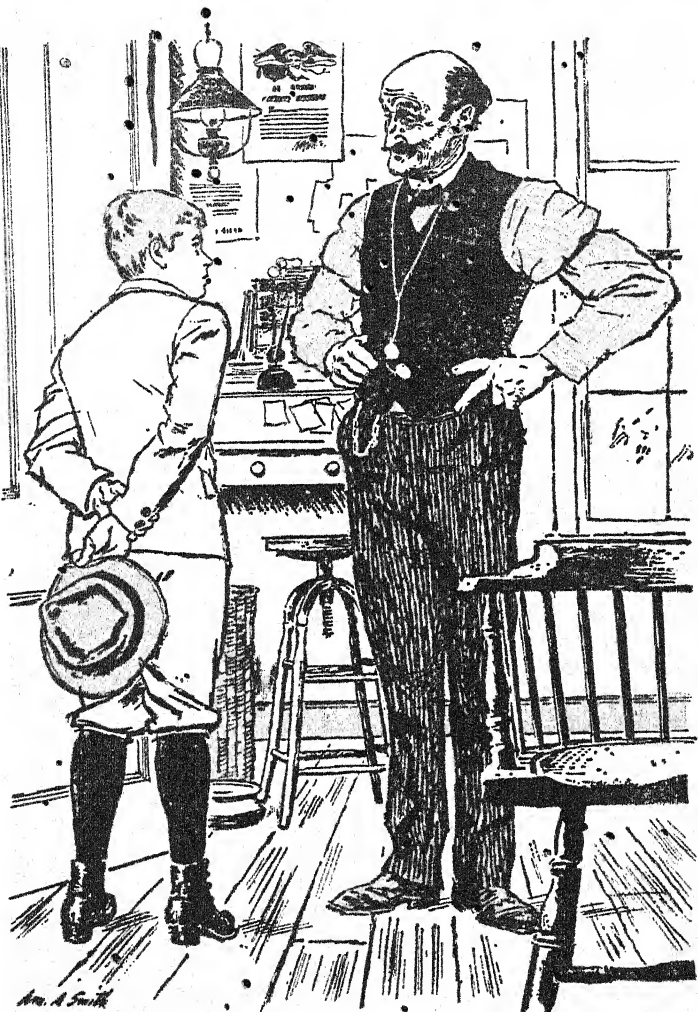
MY FATHER and I had rooms in what had once been a fine house on the plaza. People still called it *La Casa Nuñez* after the original owner although all the rooms facing the street had become shops. Like most native buildings, it had but one story. At the back was a large patio with a gallery running part-way round it.

We weren't burdened with furniture, just a hard Mexican bed, a chair and my father's brass-bound trunk in one room; a cooking-stove, pine table, chair, small bench, a few dishes and water bucket in the other. We nearly always dined here on eggs from local ranchers and on bacon, biscuits, coffee, dried fruit and pickles my father got wholesale at the commission house.

At first when my father didn't return, I lay awake half the night wondering what would become of me. Hailing from Missouri, my father thought himself superior to the Mexicans and sometimes had embarrassed me by showing it in front of them. Lying there in bed, I could imagine them talking among themselves with satisfaction of the just fate that had befallen the Anglo boy whose father had run off with Señor Kidd's gold.

How little I knew of Mexicans then, of their natural sympathies and pity for someone whose father or brother had come afoul the law! I found that, instead of hating me, they gave me soft pitying glances from their dark eyes. Our neighbours, Señora Padilla and Señora José García, fed me *toftillas*. But it was another of Spanish blood who was my deliverer and ministering angel.

This was the lady called Doña Ellen, the wife of my mother's cousin, Albert Sessions. A native-born New Mexican, she was the daughter of a Mexican mother and English father. I knew that New Mexico was a territory of the United States, yet to me it was as if Cousin Albert had married someone foreign as from Guatemala or Brazil. Cousin Albert always spoke to me in the street, but his wife had never recognized or spoken to me, perhaps because I so assiduously avoided her.



This very day I had seen her around town in her fancy buggy with space under the sides of the seat for the rubber-tyred, brass-rimmed wheels to turn with a flourish. The buggy had yellow spokes, brass lamps on either side of the patent-leather dash-board, and a matching yellow cloth top to shield Doña Ellen from the New Mexican sun. I had just passed the timber yard headed for home when I heard a rig overtake me and stop beside me in the deep floury dust. When I looked up, there was the stylish buggy with the yellow top and the lady herself holding the tan reins.

"Good afternoon, Jud. You are Jud, aren't you?" she asked brightly. "You're the very one I hoped to see. Won't you get in with me and I'll drive you back home."

To my surprise, her accent was English rather than Spanish. The stylish slant of her sailor straw and the genteel softness of her driving gloves were certainly non-Mexican, her hair a golden Anglo colour against her blue eyes. But never would I get in beside her at that moment. There flashed through my mind the tale they told of her Spanish temper and her wild English love for horses. They said she was a girl away at school when a *mozo* had put a spade bit on her favourite riding horse and after long and cruel training taught him to bow low. When she came home, he had proudly showed her horse off to her, but one look at the maimed and bleeding mouth, and she had struck the *mozo* down with the heavy end of her crop. The story was that she had killed him.

When I asked my father he said he didn't know if it was true or not, but I must remember that she was a Johnson y Campo, that the Johnson y Campo sheep ranch, the Rancho Zelandia, took in a great Spanish grant beyond the Prietas. For generations her people had had the power of life and death over their peons, and a fine horse to them meant more than a peon.

When I held off, I expected her to drive away with English abruptness and dismissal, but she was all feminine Mexican wile now. "Don't you want to ride with me?" she asked, wrinkling her eyebrows in that playful Spanish gesture of hurt, a characteristic I was to see in her a thousand times afterwards. At the same time that she spoke to me so lightly, there was something indefinably sad about her. I suspect now

it was only the faint melancholy of her Latin blood. But at the time it seemed as if some secret sorrow of hers, like mine, was sucking the joy of life from her.

I think that is what quieted my fear and stitched a bond between us—that and something else I didn't recognize at first. This was her complex femininity. She could be very, capable, determined, wilful, also satiric and funny at times. All this on occasion could vanish and an appealing helplessness come into her blue eyes and even into the way she sat or stood, so that others, and especially men, could not forbear throwing themselves into her cause, bringing to pass what she wished.

Today she seemed to me as innocent as she was beautiful, what she asked so reasonable, that before I knew it I was stumbling round the wheels, climbing up on the cushions of soft rose cloth, and we were off down the road with a feeling that no motor-car can give me today, of flowing animal limbs and muscles, of a bright tan harness with silver trimmings and a silver whip socket engraved with a name in script that I couldn't read. Everyone, I noticed, looked up with lively interest to see us go by. I saw with pride that she drove her favourite horse I had heard so much about, the fastest in the territory and her great pet. I remembered my father saying that, when he asked her how many children she had, she had told him two, both boys, one nine and one seven years old. My father learned later that she had given birth to only one child, my cousin Willy, whom I had never met, and that by her seven-year-old boy she must have meant this horse called Critter, who had been given the name by her father half in jest before he died.

Presently, in front of the large shabby Casa Nuñez, we stopped and alighted. "Will you hold Critter for me?" she asked. "He hates to be tied, but he's so curious. He likes to examine everything, and I don't want him wandering round the town with a buggy."

Never had I held a horse, and I felt sure this one she called Critter knew it. He was a shade called *oscura*, a peculiar shade of brown with faint black inner markings. I had seen much more handsome and spirited horses and wondered why a lady like Mrs. Sessions with such a fancy buggy liked him well enough to consider him one of her boys.

Today I was to get an inkling of the reason. As I took his bridle I saw him examine me quietly. He saw my fear of him, I'm sure. I also like



to think that he saw the confused loneliness of an insecure and half-starved boy. After a minute or two he turned his attention to his surroundings. I could have sworn that he surveyed intelligently and in turn the church, the bell towers, the Sisters' school next to it, the bandstand in the centre of the little park and La Casa Nuñez closer at hand.

Mrs. Sessions stayed in the house a long time. Then young Gus Padilla appeared and with importance took hold of Critter's bridle. "Doña Ellen wants to see you inside," he informed me.

I went, somewhat puzzled and reluctant. In our rooms I found a little group of people, including old Ezequiel Salazar, owner of Casa Nuñez, Mrs. García, Mrs. Padilla, and a number of their children, all at a respectful distance from Mrs. Sessions.

"Jud, we've been holding a little junta about you," she said almost gaily. "The judge and I don't like you living here by yourself. We're afraid you don't get enough to eat. How would you like to come over to my house and stay till your father gets back?"

"I want to stay here," I stammered, retreating towards the door, but the stout form of Mrs. Padilla blocked my way.

"He is in reality very unhappy and lonely here, Doña Ellen."

"How can he expect to live here alone?" that old villain Ezequiel added. "He cannot pay for these rooms. To make ends meet I should let them to Abundio Sais, who asked me about them."

"It isn't good for him to be so much alone, Doña," Mrs. García spoke up. "In your house there would be Epifania and Manuel, and later on when you came to town he would have your son."

Cousin Albert's wife took my arm as if it was all decided. "Manuel will come for your trunk and other things. Now let's go over to the house and I'll show you where you will sleep."

Before I knew it we were out on the plaza, where she left Critter looking curiously after her while we went on foot to a street nearby called La Placita, one of the spokes radiating from the square.

The white Sessions house, known as the Johnson y Campo house, looked large and imposing to me. Cousin Albert's wife pulled the fancy bell-rope and the door was opened by a flurried Mexican woman whom she called Epifanía.

When we entered I found myself in an immense dim hall, as wide as

a parlour and twice as long, with mysterious doors on either side, one of which was open, revealing ghostly shapes of sheets over indeterminate pieces of furniture. Mrs. Sessions took me to a nice room with a white iron bed, the figure of Christ on the Cross on a wall, and soft washed Navajo rugs on the floor. This was Willy's room, she told me, and the bed would be mine until they moved in, when another bed would be put in for me.

"You are all right now, Jud," she promised me. "Friends of your father will look after you till he gets back."

Her references to my father and his friends, and that he would be back, warmed me like wine, but after she had gone something went out of the house. It seemed foreign. Even its air smelt like incense. Unseen presences with a strong Spanish will and flavour seemed to come out of hiding to cast their influence in the air.

After going to bed I remembered what my father had said of the Johnson y Campo family, its power over life and death of its peons, and the story of Doña Ellen and the *mozo*. There came to me the peculiar memory of the lady's hands today as they had held the reins and as one of them had taken my arm. I felt a certain indefinable power and mastery in them. I was glad that she and Cousin Albert planned to stay out on the ranch until the autumn. By that time, I was sure, my father would be back.

## CHAPTER 2

NEXT MORNING, with the New Mexican sun shining in my window and lying brightly across the kitchen floor during breakfast, the house seemed like a different place, and the world, too. Not only then but after I sallied forth, I found my status in town had changed.

Old Ezequiel, the picture of avarice and chicanery, stopped me on the plaza to talk to me with deference in front of everyone. Lawyer Beasley, whose house stood next door to my Cousin Albert's—he had married Doña Ellen's sister, Doña Ana—acknowledged my existence by inclining his head curtly but unmistakably to me when he passed. And the town boys talked to me of my absent father with new and evident respect.

"Your papa will be back soon now," Goyo Sánchez promised me. "His cousin the judge will see that he goes free."

"For a while he may go to jail, but it will not be so bad," Pás Ramírez assured. "My uncle Angel is in the penitentiary at Santa Fé for six years. They let him come home for weddings and funerals."

"Yes, and you'll have Señor Kidd's eleven thousand dollars besides"—this from Lino García.

I answered angrily that my father had never taken the money, but they looked at me with instant dismay and disappointment. I saw that I must not object to my rank as embezzler's son if I wanted to swim with them in the river, rope milk cows and ride bareback on broken-down horses. At Epifania's orders, I went back to the house for midday dinner and found a great dish of frijoles, hot with chilli that burnt all the way down.

But it was the first day my stomach had been filled since my father left, and I felt that life was sweet again, and the one who had saved me was Cousin Albert's lady, who had put me under the protection of the powerful Johnson y Campo name. Cousin Albert's house seemed to me a citadel of peace and security.

In this I found that I was mistaken.

My first inkling came the second week the judge moved back to town. He had come alone at first, called by the September term of court. He slept in the town house during the week, returning to the ranch for the week-end. Any uneasiness I felt for his coming soon vanished. He made me call him Cousin Albert, and treated me kindly, almost as a son. He was a slender delicate man with a white skin and an unusual heavy black beard. This together with his deep voice and powerful phrases never ceased to surprise me in one so frail. Sheets still hung over the furniture in the parlour, and tonight as usual he sat in the wide hall by the hanging brass lamp which he had pulled down to read the Denver paper that had come on the evening train. In the shadows on a settee, I lay content just to be near this one remaining link to my mother. Presently the bell tinkled, and the judge rose and went to the door himself.

"Oh, good evening, Amado. Come in," he said heartily, and I saw a durably dressed Mexican with strong, brown, almost Oriental face and

eyes. I knew him as Sheriff Martínez. There were two Martínez brothers in Moro. It was the custom for Amado to run for sheriff on the Republican ticket and Francisco on the Democratic. Whichever won appointed his brother as first deputy, and a Martínez had been sheriff for Moro County since most men could remember. Usually it was Amado. At his silence tonight and the grave way he entered, I saw Cousin Albert's heartiness dissipate.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked.

"You haven't heard from the ranch?"

"You mean our ranch?" Cousin Albert seemed surprised. "Sit down, Amado."

But both men remained standing.

"You remember last year, Judge, when Señor Beasley drove his herd through Ojo Canyon? I don't mean that the *patrón* was there himself. But Jeffcoat, his foreman, said Señor Beasley told him it was too far to drive round on the public road through Canyon del Norte. The cattle would lose weight. Señor Beasley said his wife was a Johnson y Campo herself, a sister of Doña Ellen, and that Jeffcoat could come through Ojo Canyon and the Rancho Zelandia. I didn't see for myself what the cattle did to your señora's garden, but I heard. Also what Doña Ellen thought of that garden. Your señora and Jeffcoat had very hard words. She warned him never to come over your private road with a herd again."

"Yes, yes, of course," the judge said impatiently as if to urge him on.

"Well, Jeffcoat's men came through again this morning. He had a herd of fat steers Señor Beasley wanted to ship before the early price dropped. So he took Ojo Canyon like the other time. There was Doña Ellen's new garden and rose-bushes and a new fence round them. Jeffcoat did not stop."

"We mustn't blame Jeffcoat. This is Beasley's doing," Cousin Albert said angrily.

"Perhaps," the sheriff spoke under his breath, "perhaps it is a pity that Señor Beasley wasn't there instead of Jeffcoat."

The judge looked sober. "You mean someone was hurt."

"About as bad as a man can be hurt," the sheriff said gravely. "There was only one shot, a very good shot. The bullet found the forehead."



The judge stood almost like a statue. "Did his men say who did it?"

The sheriff avoided his eyes. "Who knows? A herd of cattle makes much dust. It is hard to see. But all could hear the rifle speak from the portal of your house."

"How long was the shot?"

"From all accounts," the sheriff repeated, looking away, "it was a long shot and a very good one."

Cousin Albert was silent for a while as if wrestling with something grave. "Well, I expect you to do whatever is right and necessary, Amado."

"*Gracias á Dios*, I don't have to do anything. Don Carlos came in tonight. He said it was him who fired the shot."

"Charley! Why didn't he come here to see me?"

"He told me he thought you wouldn't like to leave him out on bail on a murder charge."

"Thank you, Amado." I could see that Cousin Albert was much affected. He laid his paper on the table. Then he took his large cream-coloured hat from the rack. "I'll walk along back with you and talk to him," he said.

Later, in my bed, I lay going over what was said and the pictures created in my mind. There had been something incomplete about the story, something that passed between the two men that puzzled me, something not so much spoken as left unsaid but which each understood. I wondered how Charley Johnson y Campo could have done such a violent thing. They said that he had once been a good enough shot with the rifle, trained by his English father, but of late the only things he was known to do were drink whisky and drive fast horses. He was still more blond than his sister Doña Ellen. We boys called him the Englishman, from his light hair and florid cheeks.

Next morning when I got up Cousin Albert was already gone, but Pas and Goyo were waiting for me outside the back door. They informed me that the Englishman's horse was in our stable, and we spent the morning standing round him talking in suppressed excitement. It gave me a curious feeling to see him standing there so calmly, unaware that his master was locked up for murder only a few blocks away.

"It is not he, they say, that killed the Anglo," Pas said at length.

"Who was it, then?" I asked.

"It was not a he, but a she," Pas declared mysteriously.

For a moment I didn't know what he meant. Then I saw Manuel bearing down upon us. Doña Ellen always referred to him as a *mozo*, which meant "boy," but he was some fifty years old, a short powerful man, with a tremendous face now distorted with rage.

"What lie is this, you son-of-a-goat!" he roared and tried to get his huge hands on Pas. But Pas was too quick for him and dodged out into the alley.

All that morning I thought about the story of Doña Ellen as a girl and a whole procession of uneasy thoughts troubled me. Exactly what did Pas mean that it had not been a he but a she that had done it?

It was late noon when I found Doña Ellen's buggy outside the stable and her pet horse, Critter, in the next box-stall to her brother's bay. An empty carriage that had evidently been filled with baggage and servants from the ranch stood in the driveway while its horses out in the alley chewed corn from nose-bags before starting back to the Prietas.

Manuel scowled at me.

"You better make steps for the house. If you are wise you will repeat nothing from that young liar of a he-goat," he warned me.

The house seemed another place when I entered it. Moving slowly down the hall, I saw that the sheets had been taken from the familiar shapes in the long parlour, disclosing wholly unfamiliar furnishings. There were twin scarlet sofas, chairs in red-and-gold brocade, a tall object with filigree brass legs rising to marble shelves and crowned with a painted china lamp. Broad walnut frames inlaid with gold on the wall held only the tiniest of pictures. Another frame enclosed a wreath and one a bunch of withered flowers, mementoes of some funeral.

The doors to the other rooms off the wide hall were open now, and I saw across the way a second parlour, not so long as the other, but with a couch, an organ, a blue-tiled fire-place and a globe on a stand. As I went on I had glimpses into high-ceilinged bedrooms. Almost every room had, in addition to the bed and other heavy furniture, a couch or lounge of some kind. I had never seen such a lot of them in a single house.

I stopped before reaching the dining-room, but Doña Ellen must have

heard the front door. She came out in the hall looking even more delicate and blue-eyed than I remembered.

"Hello, Jud! Where have you been?" she greeted, as if I and not she was the one who needed comforting. "We've had to start. Come in."

She drew me into the dining-room, where dinner stood on the massive table affixed to the floor, flanked by long polished benches of enormous pine planking on either side.

"This is Willy," she said, leading me to where a dark-haired, delicate-looking boy sat. "Your place, Jud, is beside him. I hope you two will be friends. You're cousins, you know, and blood is thicker than water."

I saw Cousin Albert at the head of the table looking kindly and approvingly at me. His wife didn't take the seat I expected, but sat opposite Willy and me. I soon found that she needed no formal position at the doña's head of the table to hold court, but could take care of herself wherever she was.

She asked me questions about myself, confided to me one or two intimate things about the ranch, then wove the four of us into her conversation. Her talk was fluent. She seemed to make light of their unspoken affliction. I found this a characteristic I was to see much of, her manner of disregarding trouble and danger by making fun of both.

At first, sitting there at the table, I wondered if shooting and death had actually occurred. Then, with dinner done, it was as if the pleasant interlude, like an act in a play, was over. Faint sadness settled on her face. Gravity returned to Cousin Albert. When I glanced at Willy his dark eyes looked back at me wordlessly. What the look meant I had no idea, but I felt that I liked him and that we would get on together.

There was no telephone in the house those days to inform your friends that you had come to town, but news travelled about as fast then as now, particularly at a time like this when your friends were expected to rally round and offer support. It was a revelation to see the house bright and almost gay that evening, with wine in glasses taken from a rack of four marble shelves along the wall. The company consisted mainly of sheep people or those who did business with them.

Others arriving later included Tom Dold, a bachelor with a fund of good humour and the family lawyer since Cousin Albert had sat on the bench. Not a word was spoken of Ellen's brother languishing in jail,

but Mr. Dold's stories and confident manner spoke continuously, saying, have no fear, everything in Moro County is under control.

When Willy and I were sent to bed, his mother came to tuck him in and kiss him good night. Then she came over to my bed, which had been placed in the room, and did the same to me.

No one had kissed me since my mother had done it several years before. I remembered Cousin Albert's wife's hands as brisk and masterful, but when she pressed the clothes round my neck and shoulders I thought I had never felt a touch more gentle and soft. That such hands could have the stain of blood on them seemed to me unthinkable. I felt myself relax, grateful that for tonight at least sleep would solve all problems.

"*Buenas noches*, Jud," she said.

"Good night, Doña Ellen," I said.

"Call me Cousin Ellen," she corrected, and waited.

"Good night, Cousin Ellen," I replied dutifully.

She looked down at me in warm approval, but even as she smiled I imagined I saw deep inconsolable shadows in her eyes.

### CHAPTER 3

I USED to think the Moro County court-house was imposing, a kind of family government house since Cousin Albert held the highest office in it and ruled over it like a king in his palace. Now, after what had happened on the ranch, the aspect of the whole building changed. I found myself avoiding it whenever possible. Something dark, unfriendly, almost frightening had come over it and the jail where Ellen's brother, Charley, awaited trial. I knew it couldn't be Charley or his fate. He meant little or nothing to me. Then I remembered what Pas had hinted at. That must be the secret of my shock, an implication so terrible that I didn't dare think of it openly.

From the beginning I looked to see if anyone else might know and feel as I did. Willy came under my scrutiny first. He was a quiet boy, and there were times when he looked at me with something inexpressible in his dark eyes. I watched Cousin Albert, too, but his grave face told me nothing.

I waited for Willy's grandmother to come in from the ranch for the trial. They called her Mama Grande instead of the usual Abuelita. A short, stout woman with a swarthy face, she had the blackest of eyes. She had a tongue that ran on rapidly in Spanish, but her face and black eyes to me remained unreadable.

When Ellen's sister, Doña Ana, came over from next door to see her mother, I thought I caught a glimpse of fear in her face, but I felt it might have been fear of her husband. Even before coming to my cousin's house to live I had heard how since their marriage Lawyer Beasley had dominated and restrained her, taking over her inheritance, keeping her on a strict allowance, naming the prices she must pay even for such small things as eggs and chillies, trimming the wages of the native servants until she had to put up with some of the poorest.

Epifania had once told me how Cousin Ellen and Doña Ana had looked as girls. "Ah, you should see them together when they are little. About the same size. Only a year between them. But such a difference! Doña Ana dark. Dark skin, black hair, black eyes. And Doña Ellen with white skin and hair of gold like her father. You wouldn't believe they come from the same mother."

Now Doña Ana was older-looking than Ellen, worn-faced and sombre-eyed. It was strange to think that before her marriage she had been beautiful and gay. She seemed apprehensive, to have no will or decision of her own. "I'll see what Snell thinks," she said several times; and, when Ellen asked if she would sit with her and their mother at the trial, "I'm not sure what Snell wants."

I suspected she was here today without Beasley's permission. More than once her daughter, Felicitas, said they had better go. Doña Ana hung on as if she feared to stay but hated more to leave. From the start, Felicitas refused to sit down. I thought her the prettiest girl I had ever seen, with hazel eyes and golden hair. I felt that this was how Ellen must have looked when she was young, but Felicitas would have little to do with her Aunt Ellen now, regarding her with an attitude I was sure came from her father. Indeed she treated us all with veiled hostile coolness. Only on Willy when he wasn't looking did I see her glance soften.

Meanwhile the trial was approaching and Willy and I were told we

would have to attend. I suspect it was the idea of Tom Dold, who defended Charley, that we boys sitting with Ellen and her mother would arouse the sympathy of the jury. But all the time that Willy and I had to sit there, with witness after witness being questioned, with Cousin Albert sitting watchfully on the bench, and people crowding the room to the doors and windows, I remembered what Pás Ramírez had hinted and waited for it to raise its ugly head in the court-room.

The witness I disliked more than any other was Lawyer Beasley.

"That's my Uncle Snell and he hates us," Willy had whispered the first day. "When Grandfather died, he wanted us to let him take over and manage the ranch. But only Tía Ana would sign."

I remembered the first time I had seen the name in an advertisement in the *Moro Sentinel*:

J. SNELL BEASLEY, Attorney at Law.  
Legal Advice and Counsel. Collections Made.  
Loans Arranged. Mortgages.

My father said he was the shrewdest and richest lawyer in the county and told me stories to prove it. One, I recall, was how Beasley was engaged by a cattle-man named Lassen to defend him for the murder of a Mexican sheep-herder. There was no doubt of his acquittal, but Beasley had fixed a juror to hold out for conviction, or so everyone openly said. This prevented the jury from reaching a verdict, and a new trial was ordered, when Lassen was acquitted. The first time Beasley took Lassen's cattle as his fee, the second time his ranch, and this was the ranch whose foreman, Jeffcoat, had been shot.

And now here Lawyer Beasley was in court before me. A short thick man with a red mottled face, he was put on the stand as owner of the cattle, and let loose long blasts on his wife's right to send their cattle through Ojo Canyon and Rancho Zelandia. But no word did he breathe of the spectre that lay on my heart.

My chief hope was from something Tom Dold had said. "Don't worry about Charley, Ellen. Every man we let on the jury is a sheep-man, not a cattle-man. Most of them have Spanish blood besides."

But I think that Snell Beasley must have expected a disagreement



among the jury; for, on the last day he let Doña Ana make the show of attending her brother's trial. The jury was out scarcely an hour when they came in with a verdict of not guilty. Freed now, the prisoner pushed to his mother and Ellen in the crowd. Doña Ana was so carried away by the excitement that she, too, made her way to their side. It was a pretty scene, Charley hugged and kissed by his mother and sisters while the sheep-men stood round watching with enjoyment and approval. In her emotion, Doña Ana looked years younger.

Then suddenly the red face of Lawyer Beasley appeared. The excitement seemed to go out of Ana. Her face aged visibly as her husband took her arm and they moved away.

I went home in peace. My relief was great, not so much that Charley was freed but that court and jury had recognized no other who could have fired the shot. At supper Ellen said Willy and I had stood by loyally, that already we had missed so much school it wouldn't hurt us to miss a little more and so she was taking us out for a week's holiday to the ranch. It seemed then that God was back in His heaven and all was right with the world.

There was a celebration at the house that evening, with dozens of guests, including the family of Apolonio Sena, who had testified in Charley's behalf. Next morning Charley went back to the ranch, taking his mother with him. I think the idea was to get him away from town while the cattle-men were still there.

We made ready to leave early that afternoon. Manuel brought Critter and the yellow-topped buggy round to the front of the house. The horse, which had hardly been out of his stall during the trial, was impatient to be off. It was exciting to ride with Ellen again, her light talk, her feminine presence very near to me, her superb mastery of the horse. Pleasure in my new life swam about me. Once we had forded the river and were up on the escarpment with the broad mesa stretching before us, I could hardly wait for the shoot that she promised us. Ahead, the Prietas were a long wall of dark rock sprinkled with cedars and pines where mule deer and mountain lion could be found.

Half-way across the mesa we overtook a group of horsemen, evidently cattle-men returning to Baca County from the trial. They looked round and saw us coming but did not get out of our way. Ellen's famous

yellow-topped buggy must have symbolized for them their defeat in court at the hands of their ancient enemies, the sheep-ranchers. Ellen had to turn Critter aside to pass them on the level mesa, "Hu-chal! Hucha!" one of them sent up the sheep-man's cry derisively after us.

"Don't look back!" Ellen cautioned us, but presently the same voice yelled again. I couldn't understand what it said, but I think Ellen did because something in her face changed.

I heard hoof-beats coming after us, and that was when I learned the congenital truth about Critter, that he could never let another horse pass him, and at such a time not even Ellen could hold him. Now as the hoof-beats came closer, he answered with a burst of speed that left the other quickly behind. Ellen tried to curb him. I still retain a vivid picture of her in my mind, her gloved hands sawing on the tan lines, her slight body half-lifted to its feet.

"You fool!" she cried. "They'll think we're running away."

She could do nothing with him until sounds of pursuit behind us had ceased. Then she slowed him down, furiously turned him round, and drove slowly back until close to the horsemen. Here in the trail she waited for them to come. The transformation in her astonished me. It was a revelation to me to see with what hard relish she faced the oncoming riders. Her helpless way had vanished and been replaced with something else, still feminine but without pity and boding no good for anyone, herself included.

Critter stood perfectly quiet while the riders came, as if his honour was not involved so long as he faced them. They gave us a wide berth. None of them even spoke to us, but when they were by and Ellen passed them again they let out a series of shrill derisive Texas yells. This time she did not stop. We drove on towards the mountains, and nothing more was said about it.

If I thought Ellen a lady in town, she was still more so out here. Over the years I always thought her to be at her best among the natives. Hardly had we approached the scattered cluster of adobe buildings, dominated by the great ranch-house, when Johnson y Campo Mexicans surrounded the buggy. The swarthy women smiled. The black eyes of the children shone at their *patrona*. Men who looked to me like rascals and thieves asked with gentle courtesy of the health and well-being of

Ellen and Willy, whom they called Guillo. I was introduced as Willy's cousin and my well-being became instantly their concern. But never for a moment could I treat them as Ellen and Willy did. There was, I soon found, a great art in it, a precise stage between superiority and warm interest which I could never attain.

The second day Ellen took us on the promised shoot. She drove me in the buckboard along a pair of wheel tracks that wound for miles through the cedars and then out to a lonely expanse of plain. Willy rode his blue pony. Up near a round treeless mountain, Ellen pointed out distant motionless objects which gradually took shape for me as small brown living creatures.

They still seemed in entire safety from us when Ellen suddenly stopped the horse, passed the lines to me, drew a rifle from beneath the seat, stood up in the buckboard and fired. The lunge of the horse threw her back into the seat, but not too quickly to keep me from seeing one of the inquisitive brown wraiths drop to the range while the others fled. When we reached it, I found a beautiful small deer-like creature lying on the grass with blood running from a well-directed hole in its graceful head.

It seemed incredible to me that the antelope had been shot so accurately and at such a great distance. I didn't understand at first why Ellen's splendid shooting should bother me. I helped her lift the game to the buckboard, and then we drove back to the ranch-house. It was very strange. Our shoot had been successful. This was exactly what we had come out to the ranch for, and yet some inexplicable shadow for me had fallen over the sunlit plain.

#### CHAPTER 4

**W**E STAYED at the ranch for nearly two weeks, school or no school, and it was a bit long for me. I was glad to get away, especially from the game dinners and the dead antelope and deer hanging in a row in the cold dry air out of reach of the dogs and sun. Town had become somehow peaceful and civilized in my mind, and when we drove back through Ojo Canyon I felt escape from something, I didn't know quite what. It gave me a wonderful feeling to see Moro



lying far below us, hardly distinguishable at this distance except for a wisp of smoke hanging above it.

Town seemed even better as we drove into the plaza. Then we came to the white house on La Placita and saw workmen laying brick between the two houses.

"What in the world are they doing?" Ellen asked Chepa and Epifania, who rushed out when they saw us.

"It is to be a wall, Señora," Chepa said.

"What in heaven for?"

"Señora! Doña Aná and Felicitas daren't come over any more! Not even Suplicante! They must stay over there and we must stay over here. As long as we live."

"It is to be a high wall, Señora," Epifania said. "Seven feet up and from street to alley, Suplicante told us."

Ellen did not ask who had ordered this. We all knew. She said nothing for the moment, but as we went into the house her face was frightening.

"I didn't tell you," Cousin Albert said when he came home from the court-house, "because I didn't want to spoil your holiday. Snell is having his revenge now. He's working off his temper. It might even turn out to be a good thing."

I often thought later on how tragically wrong he was. Perhaps he knew it even then. He may have been trying to put the best possible face on a blight that would be evident to everyone in Moro and for miles around. No one had dared say anything outright about Ellen at the trial, but now, without saying a word, Beasley was giving notice that he didn't feel her a fit associate for his wife and child, who were her own sister and niece.

What Ellen thought I do not know. More than once while the men were at work on the wall, and especially when her brother-in-law came out to look it over, I saw her eyes like agates and that hard look on her face.

It was gone and in its place a kind of gay desperation when friends called. "Do you know you take your life in your hands to come? We're in quarantine and under siege, you know," she'd greet guests in her playful way. Her dinners were too late for Willy and me. We ate our

supper much earlier, but in our room we could hear her poke fun at her brother-in-law and his wall.

Almost every evening since we came back she either had guests at the house or was a guest in some other. But days were a trial to her. Many an afternoon we came home from school and found Critter hitched up in front of the house, with Ellen at the door, hatted and coated to take us for a ride.

Once the buggy wheels rolled clear of town, you could feel her other self return, her old self, the one I liked best. We drove along lanes and the more populated roads, but mostly Ellen took the wheel tracks that crossed and criss-crossed, wheeled and looped on the mesa. It wasn't only to get away from town that she went, I think, but to be driving Critter. There was a certain relationship between Ellen and her horse. The brute was close to her, a silent companion who never failed her. When he obeyed and did her will, she drew from his strength as well as from her own.

But at dusk when we got back to the house, the wall was always there. Words you could reply to and criminal charges could be refuted in court, but how would you answer or disprove an evil brick wall? Every day when town and ranch folk went by, there it was to see and remember, reviving the dark whispers.

I think it was when she couldn't stand the wall any more that she would drive to the ranch, and that was why during the holidays we went to visit the Pereas at Rancho Antiguo. But she always gave other reasons for going.

"Wouldn't you like a white Christmas?" she asked as we walked home from midnight Mass. "The only snow this year is up in La Sierra. How would you like to run up and see the Pereas?"

She made it sound so easy, as if it were only an hour's drive, but I knew La Sierra was forty miles away and the ranch of the Pereas, up near the Colorado border, must be farther. The morning we left, Moro was still in shadow but far to the north the sun was already red on the snowy summits. Critter kept up his incredible trot all the way, except now and then on the grades when he slipped back into a running walk.

"He's resting when he does that," Willy informed me. "It's the Indian shuffle."

I had never seen anyone received as Ellen was by the Pereas and their other guests at Rancho Antiguo. The men surrounded her and the women did the unheard-of Spanish act of listening. Long after Willy and I went to bed in a huge room with others younger than we were, we could hear her laugh next door in the old *sala*, a particular kind of laugh, a series of quick, tiny explosions, tumbling out all at once like mixed-up notes of music, very contagious, and delightful to hear.

But if Ellen was looked up to at the Pereas', Critter was not. The Perea family was noted for raising white sheep and black horses. They had no use for Critter's *oscurò* shade. "It's the colour of the dirt," they said. Also, their horses were their chattels, not their friends. They reined them high and trained them to prance in style. Critter's lounging ways invited their contempt.

Moreover, Critter seemed concerned about us in this strange place. He declined to graze with the other horses, but hung round close to the ranch-house. "Why are you such a baby?" Ellen scolded impatiently. "You won't stay with the other horses. You have to hang round me like a spoiled child round its mother."

When we went to the mountains, Ellen had him put in a corral so that he couldn't follow us. We saw him looking after us as we drove away to scenery more beautiful than I knew existed. The crowning point of the trip was a grassy trail through a high valley called Canyon de Espíritu Santo, or Holy Ghost Canyon, where the blue firs and red-boled pines drooped with moss and a crystal-cold river rushed down from a snowy peak at the head of the canyon.

We came back elated from our trip, but the first thing we heard as we neared the ranch was Critter whinnying at us from where he stood with his head over the corral fence.

Early next morning I felt a hand shake me under the heavy blankets spun from native fleeces. It was Ellen saying that we must go. Sleepily Willy begged to stay another day.

"No, it's impossible," his mother said. "We could be snowed in for weeks-up here."

When we got up we saw the ground already lay covered, and when we left we could see our tracks deep in the white road.

We didn't feel the force of the wind till we left the shelter of the

mountains. Coming to the mouth of the canyon, we could see in front of us the white particles driven almost horizontally from the north-west. Critter saw them, too. His ears pricked and, tossing his mane, he answered with doubled speed.

Willy laughed. "He doesn't like it, Mama."

"I hope it stings him," his mother said. "He's been a very temperamental boy."

At first it was pleasant enough racing through the snow, but after an hour or two it had grown much colder and the snow was thicker and finer, a solid white curtain closing us in.

"How do we know where we are?" Willy wondered.

Ellen answered at once. "San Antonio knows."

"He might have forgotten us up here," Willy pointed out.

"No," she promised, "I told Father Goshard I'd get a new robe for San Antonio, the best China silk and a gold hem. If we get lost up here in the snow, San Antonio knows he'd never get it." Sometimes when the Spanish came out in Ellen, she surprised me.

The cold by now was intense. We huddled under blankets, the rubber shield of the buggy buttoned up tight with the reins passing through a slit. The isinglass peep-holes were almost constantly blinded with snow except when a jolt from the wheels or our hands would clear them. But when we looked out, all we could see was the brown furry shape of Critter, a tiny moving island in the midst of a white wilderness. For the last hours Ellen had made no attempt to guide him, letting him choose his own way in the barren waste. At last I could not blot out a terrible conviction from my mind. I knew that he must be lost.

More than once Critter's trot dragged to a walk and sometimes he frightened us by stopping altogether. Peering out, we watched him rub one side of his head, then the other against the ends of the shafts. Ellen said she thought he was rubbing the icicles from his eyes. After this he went on, but sooner or later, I felt, the snow must stop him and bury us in its depths. The day dragged, growing no lighter, and it seemed a week since we had left the Perras and even since we ate the lunch they had packed for us. Suddenly Ellen startled us by her cry. Looking out of the peep-hole, I saw what appeared to be a wide grey streak in the snow. "You wonderful thing!" she screamed, and it was a moment before I



realized it was Critter she had called. "It's the Baca road!" she told us. "He never took the road to town. He's brought us down behind the Prietas straight for the ranch."

Down here there seemed to be less snow. We reached places where the wind had left our trail almost bare, and here Critter let himself go. He had been dragging a heavy buggy with three people through snow and often drifts for hours. By all accounts he should have been worn out, brought to one of those violent trembling spells that in a Western horse mean exhaustion and death. But now his legs fairly flew. The stable and alfalfa ahead seemed to tap new energies in his being.

There was great excitement at the ranch when we arrived. They hadn't known we had ever left town. Mama Grande, aroused by the commotion, called demandingly from the portal that we come in at once. But Ellen refused to go until she saw Critter cared for. He steamed in the frosty air like a railway engine on a zero morning.

Fidel came running to take over the unhitching, and led him to his stall. The hay that we thought he had run for lay plentiful in his manger, but, now that he had reached it, there was no effort to touch it. He stood with hoofs somewhat far apart, head down, as if what he wanted most in the world was just to stand there and never move. This was how he stayed while Fidel and Teófilo rubbed him down. Only once Fidel spoke. His strong brown weathered face was grave. "Dios was with you, Doña Ellen," he said. "The snow drifts worse on the Moro road. Deep as a house sometimes. Had Critter gone that way, never maybe would you have got through."

It was late in the evening when he brought word to the heuse.

"It is well now, *patrona*. Critter has started to eat."

THE BLIZZARD did something to Ellen. I never knew exactly what. Perhaps it had been the closeness of death. As she drove us back to town I felt her somehow changed from the person who had driven us to Rancho Antiguo. At home, confronted by the wall, she seemed to master her bitter emotions. In the days that followed I noticed that she avoided the wall, staying in parts of the house where it couldn't be seen, sewing the promised robe for San Antonio and taking it to church several times to measure and fit.

The second week she called Willy.

"I want you to go over to your Tía Ana for me. Say I hope they can come to dinner on Saturday evening. It will be just family, theirs and ours. Of course, I expect Uncle Snell and Felicitas. After all, Ana is my sister and Felicitas your blood cousin. We love them and I'm sure they love us."

Willy stared at his mother. This was a new Ellen.

"But do you think he'll let her?"

"He should—if we think of him with charity and kindness. Charity and kindness can do wonders, Father, Goshard says, even to Snell Beasley. You and Jud must treat him with love, Willy, when you see him."

"How do you mean?" Willy looked dismayed.

"Talk and act towards him as if he never sent his herd through our ranch. If we treat him with love, then perhaps everything will be all right."

We went outside, and reluctantly Willy took his way towards the forbidden wall and then behind it. I could see that he was uneasy. When Felicitas sprang out at us in the patio, he fairly jumped. "Willy! You'd better get out of here!" she threatened.

Willy seemed relieved if anything by the encounter. "I don't need to get out," he stammered. "Mama says we love you and you love us and everything is going to be all right."

The girl moved up in front of him. "What did you say, Willy?"

"Felicitas!" Willy implored her. "Do me the favour. Go and tell your mother for Mama that we love you and you love us and she wants you over for dinner Saturday night. Uncle Snell, too."

"You'd better go, Willy, before Papa comes home."

Willy looked at me. His face was haggard. "Come in with me, Jud!" he begged. "Whatever you do, don't run off."

Slowly he pushed open the side door and went in with me close behind. There, looking at us, as frightened as we, stood his aunt. I think she had been watching from the window. "Tía Ana!" Willy cried, grateful to see her, and stammered out his mother's invitation.

Doña Ana startled us by bursting into tears. She hugged him and cried over him, then pushed him aside and looked quickly out of the

window. "Now you'd better go, Willy," she said. "Tell your mother a thousand thanks. I'm afraid that we can't come next Saturday, but one of these Saturdays God will smile and it will be all right. I will let her know."

When Cousin Albert came home, Ellen told him. Cousin Albert nodded and looked at her gravely. But if he had judicial reservations, he kept them to himself. After all, she was the child of several races, with long lines of conflicting ancestors rising in her from the past for a moment or two before falling back into the rich and ancient blood stream.

What puzzled and almost awed me was the peace in the house that followed Ellen's offer of love. Even the icy heart of winter seemed mellowed; I had never seen a gentler January in Moro.

But the Beasleys never sent word about the dinner. Ellen kept Saturday evenings open for them, and when they did not come Willy and I would stay up to eat with her. Cousin Albert was at court in San Ysidro County. On this certain Saturday night, we were still at the mutton when we became aware of excitement in the kitchen. Then the kitchen door opened and Teófilo from the ranch burst into the dining-room. "God help us, *patrona!*" he groaned, and fell down on his knees by Ellen's chair.

I had never seen anything like this, a man such as Teófilo behaving like a grief-stricken child to a mother younger than he.

"What is it, Teo?" Ellen asked. "Is it Mama Grande?"

"No, *gracias á Dios.*"

"Is it Don Carlos?"

"He is the one, *patrona.*"

"Is he living?"

"Thanks to God, when I left. But the holes in him are deep and he lost much blood."

"Blood!" Something hard and ugly had come into Ellen's voice. We all felt it, including Teófilo. Before saying more, he got to his feet, and the story came out swiftly and passionately. Charley had started for town that afternoon for his regular Saturday-night spree. At the mesa end of the canyon he had met two men on horseback. He didn't know their names but thought he had seen them before and that they hailed

from Baca County. They had stopped him and asked if he was Charley Johnson y Campo, the one who had sworn in court he had shot and killed Frank Jeffcoat. Yes, Charley said, he was. Then they pulled their revolvers and fired on him and galloped off. Charley himself told all this an hour later to the sheep-herder who discovered him and who had run to the ranch with the news. When Fidel and others got there, they found their *patrón* still alive.

When I looked at Ellen, the new gentleness of the last weeks had wholly vanished. "Run for Dr. Gammel," she ordered. "Send him to the ranch. Tell him to hurry."

"The doctor has already gone, *patrona*," Teófilo said. "I stopped at his house first."

"Then you can help Manuel harness Critter. I will drive out myself as soon as I change my clothes."

Before she could get away, Fidel arrived from the ranch on another smoking horse with the word that Charley was dead. He had met the doctor on the mesa and told him, but the good señor doctor said he was the coroner and had to go anyhow. Besides, Mama Grande would probably need him.

If Ellen mourned, it was in secret. Her cool English blood seemed to take charge. She dispatched Manuel for the sheriff. The door to the second parlour was shut while she talked to Amado Martínez. All I heard was his promise to send a telegram to Cousin Albert when he left.

Ellen drove Willy and me to the ranch. Once we had left town, she seemed more Spanish than English. The cry of grief with which she and Mama Grande greeted each other sounded almost foreign to me, as did the *velorio del defunto* a night or two later in the big house, with the natives coming in and sitting on benches round the white walls, the songs of death and sorrow, murder and revenge, and the supper served with the inevitable *café* and *vino*. All the time the corpse lay in a coffin made by the ranch carpenter and covered with black cloth, Charley's blond hair and English features looking out of place here amid the foreign talk and songs and dark faces.

Services for Uncle Charley were held in the ranch chapel, with Father Goshard in charge. Only the family and important family friends could get into the chapel. It was as cold as a cave, but not so cold as outside,

where more than a hundred Mexicans stood in the bitter wind listening to what sounds of the Mass came through the open door.

Services were delayed, waiting for Doña Ana. Not till Father Goshard was at the altar did she come with Beasley. I thought he tried to keep her to the back, but she slipped up to the front between Ellen and Mama Grande, where she held a hand of each. That was also the way they stood at the grave, while Beasley waited expressionless just behind her. I was next to him and had full opportunity to see the dark blood in his temples and the thick immovable way he stood.

It was an unforgettable scene. A desert graveyard is to me one of the loneliest sights in the world, an expression of man's transience and unimportance on earth, and the Rancho Zelandia cemetery was no exception. The few gravestones had been visibly mended after being twice knocked down by Beasley's herd. Wooden crosses, split and broken by hoofs, had been bound by twine. This, with the empty tinsel that Mexicans like to heap on their graves, gave the place a shabby and pitiful air. To me our little group of humans standing there by the open grave looked helpless and insignificant against the vast spaces beyond. A short distance from the open grave was the patch of unsanctified desert waste where Frank Jeffcoat's still partially fresh mound could be seen. His grave and Charley's were not a hundred yards apart. They stood out like unhealed scars from the rest of the landscape, and I wondered how many more lives would be dragged down into the dark and silent earth before it was over.

## CHAPTER 5

**N**O ONE had seen two strangers in the vicinity on the day Charley was killed

But a week later Apolonio Sena, the sheep-rancher who had testified Charley's character at the trial, was shot and killed on his ranch, and this time the men who had done it were recognized and named. They were Grover Reid and Earl Paulson, both outspoken "Jeffcoats," a term we had begun to call cattle-men and their sympathizers. Nearly everyone, I think, felt at once that these were the same men who had done the earlier killing. First, there had been two of them, as Charley had

said. Then, the shooting of Frank Jeffcoat was involved in both cases.

At first most of us were not too excited over the fate of the Apolonio Sena killers. Then we grew aware that there might be more in their trial than we thought. In fact, by the time it came round, the trial of Reid and Paulson became perhaps the most significant to take place in the county, not so much for the crime named in the case but because it stood for the more sensational murder never officially mentioned in the trial, that of Charley Johnson y Campo.

The first time I became conscious of possible ugly complications ahead was before the two men had been arrested.

"I hope those two Jeffcoats cleared out for Old Mexico," Tom Dold said to Cousin Albert.

It sounded strange to me coming from him. I expected Cousin Albert to reply that, no matter who they murdered, the two men should be caught and tried. To my surprise, he turned to Tom and confided in a low voice, "If I wasn't an official sworn to recognize the legal processes, I'd be tempted to suggest that they get out of the country before those processes catch up with them and us all."

Now what made him say that, I wondered, and especially the "us all"? Whatever his thoughts, I'm sure he said nothing of them to Ellen. She had been hard hit by Charley's murder. This was brought home to me when we were back in the house at Moro. Cousin Albert had returned to court in San Ysidro County. That evening Tom Dold and others were in the *sala*.

"Well, Paulson and Reid were brought in today," Tom mentioned. "The first thing they wanted was their lawyer."

I saw the quick lift of Ellen's head. "I should think no decent lawyer in Moro County would defend them."

"I'm afraid they didn't have to go very far."

We all knew whom he meant.

"I'm not surprised," Ellen said bitterly. "I shan't rest till both of them are convicted and hung." Her vehemence surprised me.

"The Jeffcoats are saying," Tom went on, "that since Charley was freed by the court, Reid and Paulson should be freed also."

"But Charley didn't go free," Ellen declared swiftly. "He's dead, and that should be the fate of these men, too."

She said it with such passion and devotion to her murdered brother that I felt strong sympathy for her. Indeed, I thought her admirable as she sat there, faithful, with high principles.

When the motion was brought by Beasley that Cousin Albert disqualify himself from sitting in the case because of the linking of the two killings in the public mind, I heard Cousin Albert tell Willy: "To abandon the bench in this case would be deserting your mother. She'd think it public admission that I thought these two Jeffcoats had cause to do what they did."

Not till the Grand Jury had returned an indictment, the two men had been arraigned, and threatening Jeffcoats from several counties had begun rallying in their defence did I realize what lay ahead of us—another ugly and interminable trial, vindictiveness and more vindictiveness. I saw that the one on whom the brunt of it would fall was not Ellen so much as Cousin Albert, who had had little or nothing to do with it but must stand up for her interest, bringing in if possible a verdict she would regard as just, and then endure the storm that must break on him.

The trial was set for the autumn term of court. For some time I had noticed that Willy was not himself; his face looked dead white. Ellen got Dr. Gammel to examine him and leave twisted white papers containing an ugly-tasting powder. But all spring while the peaches and apricots were in delicate bloom against the raw brown land, Willy's complaint grew no better.

Now as I look back I think that Willy felt things ahead that I didn't. He wasn't trying to forget so much as to recapture while there was still time. For this he was given an exceptional summer. Everyone said they had never seen the range greener. When school was finished for another term and we had moved back to the ranch, he cleaved to his saddle like an axe head to the handle.

There's a blessed amnesia about life in the saddle. To Willy the big ranch-house was home, the Casa Grande, the house of many rooms. Whenever in the past there had been need of a new room, the Campos had simply laid out more adobe bricks to dry and added the walls they wanted. There were some twenty-six or -seven rooms, one entering the other or into some small hall, and all built round a central patio shaded



by two narrow-leaved mountain cottonwoods. Willy knew every room intimately. He had been born in one.

But now, I think, Willy had begun to feel the emanation of things long past, dark ancient influences in the house, perhaps shadows cast by the future. We never spoke of them. All I knew was that when we went out of the house he seemed to feel better, as I did, and that once lifted to our ponies' backs we had freed ourselves for a time from the presence of evil or its power to harm us. Riding out, we were prisoners suddenly escaped to the unfettered world of land and sky. Before, behind and beneath us swept the open range, fenceless, seemingly without border or end. This was the older, more joyous world where the Creator and the mark of His hand were still to be felt. We breathed air never before tasted by a human being. We watered our horses in ponds unnamed and unknown except by wild waterfowl. To come on these or on some bright wild garden of range flowers, blossoms that probably had never before been seen by the human eye, gave us a feeling of the largesse of God and of receiving favours directly from His hand.

The hour we liked best was just before sundown, when the glare of the desert day is gone. Then the soft red sunlight lies on the western slopes of the grassy swells and buttes and the violet light from distant mountains begins to reach out to you and beyond. Often we loitered in some distant spot so that we could ride home through it without talking; our minds closed to such things as courts, open only to the delicious awareness of a more primitive existence.

Willy hated, I know, to see the summer days go by and especially in



the cedars. They grew in a belt two to five miles wide and unnumbered miles long at the foot of the Prietas, a rolling, sometimes almost level country of riders' delight. The open range is nearly always the same, but in the cedars the rider is swallowed up in an endless succession of glades and parks where for the distance of a few yards or rods the cedars and piñons for some unknown reason refuse to grow.

I remember two or three spots Willy showed me that the Mexicans said were evil. They looked to me like any other, patches of grama grass surrounded by clumps of the dwarf trees. "Once in the past a very bad thing happened here," Willy told me in a low voice. "Even our ponies know it."

It was true that they didn't like to stop and graze here as they did other places. Willy and I would stay as long as we dared, tasting the sensation of chill. Suddenly, as if some unknown thing was about to burst out of the deformed cedars, we would look at each other, dig our heels into our ponies' sides, and gallop off, heading for the open range where as far as we could see lay the calm peace of the wide spaces.

There was one thing, we were to learn, that we couldn't gallop away from so easily. This was the trial to come. It lay directly ahead, coming nearer and still nearer each time the sun rose.

WHEN we left the ranch in September, the coming trial had already taken over the town. Fall's Wagon Yard near the river looked full, we noticed as we drove by, and we found the plaza choked with horses and unhitched teams. It was all the more significant since this was round-up time on the cattle ranches. Of course, some of the visitors were sheep-men intent on seeing judgment overtake the enemy who had shot down two of their fellow ranchers in cold blood. But most of them were cow-men who hated sheep. Most of the cow-men knew Judge Sessions' wife as a Johnson y Campo, and they knew her yellow-topped buggy. I noticed that those in the street gazed beligerently at us as we drove by.

"Pay no attention," Ellen said. "Looks don't kill. We won't perish."

Even in the sanctuary of the big white house on La Placita I could feel the tension in the town, an oppression that hung black over the mesa for days. Ellen felt it too and revelled in it. This was the Spanish

in her, responding to crowds, emotion and suspense. Anyone could see now that the trial concerned more than justice to Apolonio Sena. The house had never been so filled since I knew it. First Mama Grande came in for the duration. Then ranching friends of the family paid visits while attending the trial, the Pêreas from La Sierra, and others I had never seen before.

This time Willy and I were not required to go to the trial, but hardly a detail was spared our young ears. News from the court-room reached our kitchen and stable as quickly and sometimes quicker than it did the two parlours. At dinner and supper, at the head of the table, on her rawhide-seated chair overlaid with a scarlet cushion to raise her a little, Ellen reigned over her court, never letting it get out of hand, injecting lightness and wit when it became too serious. "There are two places," she would say, "where, no matter how dull, we must listen and never interrupt or ask questions or argue. One is in church." Everyone would laugh at Father Goshard if he was there. "The other is in court," and then the laughter would be at Cousin Albert.

To my surprise, the name of the lawyer who defended the murderers was never mentioned. But a great deal was said about *el culebrón*, "the large snake," and it took me some time to realize that this was their name for Snell Beasley, and then I understood the contempt with which the word was spoken.

Cousin Albert would say little or nothing about the case. "Ask me a month from now," he'd say when appealed to for some opinion bearing on the trial. "Today I'm just a piece of furniture pulled up to Ellen's table. I don't hear and I don't speak."

The only time Willy and I had to attend the trial was when Cousin Albert sentenced the killers. A verdict of first-degree murder had been brought in by the sheep-man jury, a great victory for the prosecution. Only Willy and his father didn't seem to share in the triumph, which seemed unfortunate because, of all the participants, Cousin Albert had had the hardest time, hearing the endless testimony, ruling on allegations and motions for dismissal, silencing the angry demonstrations of the Jeffcoats from time to time, and keeping the case generally in hand. Now at the sentencing his eyes were stern as he gazed at the two prisoners standing in the box.

"Grover Reid and Earl Paulson, you cruelly and for ever deprived a fellow citizen of life and pursuit of happiness, one Apolonio Sena. You are now remanded to the custody of Sheriff Martínez to be returned to your cells, and on Friday, February twentieth, you will be taken to the jail yard and duly hanged by the neck until dead."

The words and the way he spoke them sent a chill along my spine. He turned and glanced down into the packed court. His eyes met Ellen's. For a moment something passed between them. His look seemed to say he had vindicated her trust in him and delivered the murderers to their proper end. Then I thought he looked suddenly tired as he turned away.

"Well, thank the Lord they'll get theirs," I said to Willy as we went out.

He didn't answer and when we reached the bright winter sunlight I saw that he kept his face away.

Ellen had wanted to give a supper party that evening in celebration, but Cousin Albert overruled it. He said it would look unseemly and if she held it he wouldn't attend. It was the first time I heard him take such a firm stand in opposition to her and I thought the ordeal of the trial had steeled him. To my surprise, she did not mock or disregard him. "Whatever you think, Albert," she said.

From this time on I thought I detected a change in their relationship. Up to now Cousin Albert had been the one to come to her. He used to stand waiting a long time just to see her come out of her room or into the *sala*. Now it was she who came to him. Was he all right? Could she or Epifania do anything for him? And when there was nothing else, she would set herself to entertain and amuse him. Cousin Albert didn't try to resist her charming ways, but when she turned away, I noticed that the grave melancholy returned to his face.

I thought at first that her increased affection for him was gratitude, payment in her kind for his justice in avenging Charley, but later I was not so sure. I knew that some cattle-men were still in the town and heard that they had made threats against us.

After the sentence, one morning in the early hours, men on horseback shot out the plate-glass windows of both front parlours, and rode away again, yelling and shooting into the air. Ellen gave Willy and me strict

orders to stay off the street except on our way to and from school. Mama Grande grew alarmed and would let Ellen go nowhere on foot. Only Cousin Albert went his usual way, marching twice daily, to his court chambers.

All the time the hanging grew closer, and then came the night Manuel told us that the two godless savages had been finally hanged, after refusing to kneel with the executioner and preacher when the latter prayed for them.

Now I expected the full fury of the cattle-men to be directed against us, but nothing happened. The hangman's victims were duly buried in the Protestant cemetery. The last cattle-men drifted back to their ranches.

"It's all over now, *gracias á Dios*," Mama Grande said and went home to the ranch.

But I wasn't so sure. Once Tom Dold was closeted with Ellen behind closed doors when Cousin Albert wasn't at home. At noon and in the evening she grew restless until Cousin Albert would return from the court-house. Long before his usual hour she began looking for him.

The court term at Moro was over now. Next on the calendar was the spring term in Baca County, which was cattle country. To get there from Moro Cousin Albert had to make a three days' journey with the matched pair of blood bays, Dan and Choppo, in his black pole buggy.

"Will you do me a favour, Albert?" Ellen asked him at the dining-table one day. "Ask Judge Otero to take over Baca this spring."

He looked startled. "Judge Otero? But how could I do that?"

"You could say you were indisposed. You've had a long and difficult ordeal."

"I am a little tired, yes," he admitted, "but not indisposed."

"It's the same thing. Wouldn't you do it for me?" she begged.

Cousin Albert looked profoundly disturbed. "I would do anything within reason for you, Ellen. But this is impossible. Judge Otero and many others would think me afraid."

It was the word "afraid" that suddenly revealed the spectre that haunted the back of Ellen's mind. For a moment I could see the wild uninhabited region Cousin Albert must traverse on his way to Baca County, the lonely canyons he must pass through, the remote mesas to

be crossed, where a trail might lie for days abandoned except to wild things and stray cattle.

For about a week I didn't hear Ellen bring up the matter again.

"Will you take Willy with you, Albert?" she suddenly begged him the day before he left.

"Willy?" He drew back. "Ellen, you ask the most impractical things."

"Why is it impractical?" She saw him hesitate and pushed her advantage. A very torrent of Spanish words and a woman's reasoning ensued. Now when I glance back I think I can read her thought, her realization that it was she who had got him into the position from which there was no retreat, and this was her last resort to protect him. Her intuition told her that not even the most hardened of men would fire on a buggy if it contained a young boy. It may be she believed that, if like Abraham she would offer her son as a sacrifice, Dios would not take the life of one so innocent and unsinful.

"I cannot do it, Ellen," Cousin Albert declared. "If I did——"

Ellen interrupted, "If not Willy, you must take me!"

I knew then, and Cousin Albert knew too, that she meant it. I knew also that if there was one thing a man hated it was to hide behind a woman's petticoats. He considered a long time and his face was pale, but in the end he agreed reluctantly to her demand.

Willy's eyes lighted when his mother told him. He was wild with excitement over the chance to be with his father out in the range country, and he pleaded that I be permitted to go too. No, that would put too big a burden on his father, Ellen told him, and, besides, surely he wanted me to stay and look after her? He did not protest too much then.

Court in Baca County was to open on Monday morning. Willy and his father left the previous Wednesday in the black buggy. A scattering of local people came to see the judge off. Among them was George Atkins, the druggist, with his camera and tripod.

I have an enlarged print of the scene he snapped that day. In the photograph Dan has one front foot raised, pawing to go. Holding the reins, Cousin Albert sits in the buggy, his back straight, his black beard covering his tie, wearing his Western hat with a narrow brim and a high crown. Beside him sits Willy looking happier than any photographer before had been able to snap him.

There is only a trace of Ellen's skirt in the photograph. But I have a vivid memory of her standing just inside the gate, her face colourless, her eyes straining after the buggy until it turned and vanished into the plaza.

## CHAPTER 6

THERE ARE a few small things we know now about Cousin Albert's and Willy's journey. It is one of the most famous cases in New Mexican history. People still talk about it. But we knew almost nothing then.

With the others gone, Ellen left for the ranch in the morning. She did not ask me along. She seemed to have forgotten me. A week later when she came back from the ranch, she seemed calm, like her old self. The period of suspense was over. Cousin Albert's trip to Baca County took only three days at most. He must have arrived long since and everything was all right.

I suppose I looked a little forlorn.

"*Pobrecita!*" she said. "I shouldn't have left you alone in the house. You suffer like me with Willy away."

That evening at dinner she tried to make up for her neglect. "You missed the trip with Willy. Now I must tell you some things you missed. The country is nothing much. But the people make up for it. The first night you would have stayed with the Romeros. There is Cosme. He doesn't count. The all-important are his four sisters. They are the priceless ones. What one says, the others must say, too. Everything is said four times. It is like an echo. It runs all round the room. *Oye, oye, oye, oye.* Listen, listen, listen, listen. If one of them forgets to say it, the others look at her in horror. She's committed treason."

Her description of the Romeros made me laugh.

"And then San Mateo," she went on. "Have you ever spent the night in an Indian pueblo? Well, you would be an honoured guest. You would be the cousin of Albert, el Juez Sessions. Carasco, the governor, is our friend. Your Indian bed is just a rug on the floor, and you think you hear strange primitive things during the night, but maybe to hear them you must have Indian blood in you as I do."

She was at her best regaling me with Cousin Albert's third stopping place, almost at the end of his journey.

"The Banbury's are the English ones. They raise sheep and wolf-hounds. When you sit at dinner, there's a tremendous dog like a lean and hungry grey wolf sitting on each side of you watching you eat. You think you'd better be quick getting the food to your mouth or it will be snatched away. You are in a dobe house five thousand miles from London, and yet everything, even their dress, is English. Once my father and I came just at dinner. A Lady Somebody or other was at the table in a low-cut evening dress. When she stood up I found she had tucked it into a man's riding-breeches."

I fancied at dinner that, all the while Ellen chattered and I laughed, Chepa served us with a cruel face. Ellen noticed it at last.

"Chepa. What is it?" she asked.

"Nothing, *patrona*," the servant said.

Ellen's eyes grew thoughtful. "There is something."

"Nothing, nothing, *patrona*," Chepa blurted and hurried out in the kitchen.

I saw now that Ellen had sobered. "Will you go down to the court-house for me, Jud? Tell Amado I would like to see him. Straight away."

It was necessary to go to several restaurants before finding the sheriff. I thought that he exchanged an uneasy look with the deputy, who sat opposite him at the table. When finally he arrived at the house, his brother was with him. It was not a good sign.

Ellen received them in the wide hall.

"Have you heard from the judge, Amado?" she asked at once.

"No, *señora*, not yet," the sheriff said.

"Well, have you heard anything about him?"

"No, *señora*, nothing definite. There is not time." He said it very elaborately.

"Everyone is so strange," Ellen declared. "First Chepa and now you. I am sure you know something, a rumour perhaps. What have you heard?"

The two brothers exchanged masked glances.

"We have a visitor from Baca County, *señora*, Señor Haddon, the deputy sheriff."

"Well, tell me! What did he come for? What did he say?"

"He just brought news that the judge was late, señora."

"Well, how late? Did he finally get there?"

"We don't know, señora. He told us there is no emergency. Court is being postponed till the judge comes."

"But why didn't the judge get there? Why don't you go out with your men and see where he is?"

"Señor Haddon just got here this afternoon, señora. There has not been time. We will go over the trail in the morning. But I am sure the judge is there by this time. You must not worry. If anything had happened, Señor Haddon would have found out about it on the way."

The sheriff and his party left in the morning, but learned nothing, except that Cousin Albert had never reached Baca. The story of the judge's delay, his unknown whereabouts, and finally his complete disappearance became the chief topic in the whole territory. Mama Grande heard of it at the ranch and sent Fidel for particulars. A succession of friends called at the house to ask for news. Now that the initial bad news was broken, the Martínez brothers called regularly to report.

It seemed incredible to me that posses of experienced men could search the trail and find nothing. They learned that the judge and Willy had spent the first night with the Romeros and the second at the San Mateo pueblo. Next morning an Indian boy shepherd had seen the judge and Willy drive by some eight or ten miles west of the pueblo. The judge had waved to him. Apparently this boy was the last to have laid eyes on either one. It was as if they had been swallowed up by the earth itself.

Of all the mysteries that ever gripped the territory, this, I think, has puzzled many of us the most. There had been tragic disappearances in New Mexico before, and have been since, but most of these have concerned obscure people. This had happened to a United States judge on official rounds of duty and to his eleven-year-old son.

It was hard on me, but Ellen was the one on whom the suspense centred. In the afternoons and evenings she had to receive callers and hear their questions together with the retitation of all the wild stories and rumours going the rounds. One account was that the judge, Willy and the two horses had been shot and buried in the sand, with the burnt and dismantled buggy, and that, unless the winds some day might



unearth them, their remains would never be found. Another was that Willy had been spared and taken to the lonely highlands of Old Mexico, where he was given to a remote Mexican family to bring up so that in time he would no longer remember his mother and father or his New Mexican home. A third story was that Cousin Albert had fled with another woman and taken Willy forcibly with him, and that he had died of homesickness and sorrow, to be buried in California.

What turned out worse than the ugly rumours as time went on were the clues that aroused hope only to be proved false. Some claimed they had seen Willy among the Navajos north of Gallup. Some swore the judge had been recognized in Denver or El Paso or some other place, that he had seemed bereft of his memory. Cousin Albert's horses were said to have been seen and identified in the hands of strangers, and his pole buggy as well.

Through it all Ellen bore up splendidly, her cheeks a little feverish, her eyes too brilliant perhaps. Sometimes I thought that she bore up too well, that she almost enjoyed the excitement, the attention, the stream of visitors, especially the constant consolation of Tom Dold and Dr. Gammel. She must feel some responsibility. And yet, here she was, affected certainly but still the lady, in the last extremity untouchable, the possessor of some quality difficult to name. In sorrow, as in pleasure, she was just a little beyond reach, not wholly duty-bound, answerable only to herself. Then I learned that I was mistaken. The word came that the county authorities had given up the search. Amado Martínez himself broke the bad news one sunny afternoon. "I can't ask the men to keep on looking for ever, señora," the sheriff said. "The country is too big and we have found nothing. Now we must stop."

This time Ellen didn't go to the door when he left. She sat in her chair, very pale. Her face had a transparent quality sometimes seen in the cheeks of the dead. "God forgive me," I heard her say in Spanish, "that I've never been able to cry."

I don't think she knew I was there, or cared. But now she turned and saw me. Something in her eyes seized on me. I thought afterwards that what caught her was my kinship to Cousin Albert and Willy, that I was blood of their blood, the closest living thing to either of them she had left.

"Never let anyone stop you, Jud, from doing what you think you should do," she told me passionately. "Had I followed my senses, I would have gone with Albert, no matter how much he hated to hide behind my skirts. Then if anything would have happened, I'd have been with him. If the Jeffcoats jumped him, I'd have been there to talk them out of it. If in the end they killed him, they would have had to kill me, too."

At her words the old admiration, affection and loyalty for her flooded up in me, and more than once during the night, when I remembered what she said, warm tears rose to my eyes.

When the authorities gave up, that was when Ellen said she herself would start looking for Cousin Albert and Willy. Tom Dold and Dr. Gammel protested. "No one will hurt a woman," she said. "Besides, I am taking Fidel and Teófilo along. And Jud," she added with a glance at me. "If he is not afraid."

"Few of us were afraid, Ellen, that they would dare touch the judge and Willy!" Tom Dold reminded.

"Albert never carried a gun," she answered. "I am going armed." Something in her eyes and the way she said it brought up the old uncertainties about her in my mind.

We left for the ranch next morning. Mama Grande heard the plan with her expressionless black eyes. "If it will help you to go, you must go," she said to Ellen. "But why take another boy into that bad country? What can he do?"

"Jud is Willy's cousin," she reminded her mother. "Now he can see where Willy went."

I felt Ellen had another and deeper reason for taking me, one rather of fate and of meetness. Whatever happened to Cousin Albert she was willing to have happen to her, and what happened to Willy I was not above having happen to me.

We left the ranch in a brilliant sunrise. Ellen and I drove in her familiar yellow-topped buggy, an object that would betray her identity wherever we went. Critter was in the shafts. Fidel and Teófilo followed in the light wagon, which was packed with provisions and bedding and several saddles. Spare horses were on behind.

It was good to look round and see Fidel and Teo following us. Both men had inherited the best qualities of both the Spaniard and Indian. I never knew them to be tired. Their eyes, black, sharp, shrewd, fearless, missed nothing. They were, I felt, the ablest of companions in this rough and dangerous country they knew so well. Neither wore guns, but Ellen had made them put fire-arms in the wagon. Her own light rifle was on the floor between us.

Ellen said she meant to follow Cousin Albert's route as faithfully as she knew how. Late that afternoon we arrived at the Romeros'. The four sisters greeted Ellen like a rich and respected cousin towards whom they felt fervid sympathy. Ah, true enough, the judge had stopped with them, and Guillermo. Who then would have supposed that this unknown and terrible evil was waiting for them beyond? The air was filled with *ah dolor, ah dolor, ah dolor, ah dolor* till my head swam.

I was glad to get away next day and I think Ellen was, too. "I hoped they'd remember something important Albert had said," she told me. "Some word that he had changed his plans. But they could tell us nothing but *por Dios, por Dios, por Dios, por Dios.*"

She mimicked them perfectly, but there was no fun in it today.

This beautiful Indian country, I knew, must have been one of the last things Willy and Cousin Albert had seen. But there was little pleasure for us in the cinnamon boles of the giant pines, the clear spring-fed mountain streams. Then we went down into a deep red rock canyon where we found the irrigated fields and adobe houses of San Mateo pueblo. Here Willy and Cousin Albert had spent their last known night. Just west of here the shepherd boy had been the last person to report seeing them alive.

The short stout pueblo governor, Carasco, a striking figure with iron-grey hair against a rich copper face and a bright red headband, welcomed us with dignity. That evening in his own house he talked to Ellen about Cousin Albert. He spoke Spanish with a curious Indian accent, hard for me to understand.

"Who knows what happened to my friends, the white alcalde and his son? There are devils that float through the air and hover over their prey. Sometimes they even ride horses and lie in wait," he added, watching her closely to see if she caught what he was saying.

"Yes, I understand, Carasco," Ellen said.

His short thick figure, mounted on a black horse, he rode out beside the buggy next morning. West of the pueblo, he pointed out where the shepherd had seen Cousin Albert's black buggy pass. We were in a broad semi-arid country. The wind was blowing, and the dust-shrouded sky gave everything a look of desolation.

"This is the place, Fidel," Ellen said. "From here on."

I knew what Ellen meant. I could feel it myself, a forsaken quality that reminded me of the wind-swept cemetery at Rancho Zelandia. But here something else could be felt, a wildness far back in time and the human heart.

Presently Ellen motioned Fidel to drive abreast. They conferred, and from here on either Fidel or Teo went on foot ahead of the buggy, eyes keenly examining the trail and ground adjoining. Sometimes one would leap on a saddled horse and ride him to the right or left to investigate some peculiar landmark or shape of sand. Once grazing cattle testified that we were now in the country of the Jeffcoats. The hair at the back of my neck stirred.

I saw that our slow careful pace would leave us far short of any habitation that night. Towards late afternoon we came to the malpais, a black ridge of broken blocks of lava reaching across the face of the land. On one side the winds had created a region of sand dunes several miles deep and running as far as the eye could see. With the malpais still before us, we camped in a gully where a slender rivulet of water ran clear as crystal from the ugly black rock. That night, so far as I could tell, Ellen slept calmly. Whenever I roused, which was often, I saw that one of the Mexicans remained awake, standing off in the shadows listening.

We stayed there for several days. Where the long arm of malpais finally ended and the trail ran round it Fidel and Teo went over the ground minutely, digging into hundreds of dunes and spreading the sand out on the ground. In the end they found nothing.

More than once I rode off into the rugged country, hoping to find a clue to the missing travellers, yet fearing to catch a glimpse of a Jeffcoat rider watching like an Indian from one of the ridges. But I saw no one and nothing, only the immense dry broken earth, the endless sand and

the black landmarks of malpais which made it impossible for me to get lost.

Each day I thought Ellen's face grew more weary and baffled. Not even the two nights we stayed at the Banburys' were able to soften it, the friendliness of the wolf-hounds, the English hospitality. This was the first time, I think, that she ever admitted to herself the possibility that Cousin Albert and Willy might never be found, their fate swallowed up like the riddle of the Sphinx in the well-kept secrets of this aloof and silent land.

## CHAPTER 7

IT WAS strange to come back to Moro without Cousin Albert and Willy, knowing no more about them than before. The town seemed an empty shell today. What gave me the strangest feeling was passing the court-house. It seemed impossible that the county could get on without Cousin Albert. Now already a new man, Judge Saxton, had been appointed from Washington and was at this moment sitting at Baca County court where Cousin Albert was to have been.

The worst was to think of Cousin Albert and Willy gone, and then to see Snell Beasley going about his business unaffected, more alive and prosperous than ever. His political power, they said, had risen with Cousin Albert out of the way. Judge Saxton, we knew, was Beasley's friend and had been appointed through his influence.

Even Tom Dold, I thought, seemed impressed by Beasley's growing importance. He told Ellen that her brother-in-law had taken a younger man, George Steffy, into his office. Apparently it gave Beasley more time for outside activities.

One evening at dinner Tom said, "Ellen, Beasley wants me to argue a case with you in his behalf."

"Argue what case?"

"Your willingness to sell Critter."

Ellen went white.

"I wouldn't dream of parting with Critter, Tom. And if I did, I would hardly put him at the mercy of that brute."

Through the rest of dinner I saw that Ellen looked at him with

intense questioning eyes. I suspect she kept learning, as I had, the bitter truth that Cousin Albert was indeed gone, that another power reigned and even Tom was ready to bow before it. The king was dead, long live the king.

But if Beasley was king now, at least he couldn't have Critter. It was a small thing, but it gave me satisfaction. We still had the fastest horse in the territory, or so I thought. I wasn't so sure of it when we heard that Beasley had bought a racing horse in Texas and was bringing him home to use in the shafts of his run-about.

When the horse was led down the alley to the stable next door, followed by a small crowd, Manuel told me, "Pretty fine-looking nag. Hardly six years old. Looks fast. Arabian blood. Day after tomorrow they exercise him on the track."

The Moro track was an open piece of dry sandy land on the other side of the railway. I went there on Saturday afternoon and was surprised to see that a few other persons had gathered. My heart sank as I saw Beasley's new horse on the track. He was a thoroughbred, a little longer and rangier than Critter, a chestnut and more handsome. Moreover, he was younger than Critter, just coming into his power. His speed was impressive, and there was a professional look about him.

There was a great deal of talk in Moro about the new horse that month. Beasley challenged any horse in the territory, and this was freely quoted in talk and print. But if Ellen saw or heard of it, she ignored it. The only time she referred to it was when, nettled by her silence to the challenge, I blurted out that people thought she was afraid of running Critter.

I knew then by the instant brilliance of her eyes that I had struck fire. "I won't race Critter, Jud. Critter isn't a race-horse. He's my buggy horse. He's devoted to me and I'm devoted to him. Long before Albert and Willy left us, people urged me to put him on the track. But I never have and I never will. I think this should be made more emphatic. The next time Tom comes to the house, I'll ask him to inform Snell and whoever else is necessary."

From the way Lawyer Beasley went, by the next time I saw him, I suspected that Tom had told him. He had a look on his face that might be described as curdled amusement. But I didn't know then the extremes

of cunning to which Snell Beasley's ambition went, nor that his amusement came from something else he was working out in his mind.

Ellen refused to put on mourning, not knowing what had happened to Cousin Albert and Willy. On the other hand, she had certainly given no parties since Cousin Albert had left. Mostly she busied herself with the ranch, was out with Mama Grande half the time. Once Dr. Gammel told me it was a good thing she had the sheep business to throw herself into. It took her mind off her tragedy.

Inevitably, when she was in town, she drove out for a ride in the afternoon. Often she took me with her, and I could feel the good it did her when we got away from town, the wheels turning and Critter bearing her on.

This afternoon she was not at the house when I came home. I went out to the stable. Critter's box stall was empty. Manuel told me she had left two hours before, that she said something about driving north to the Saturnino Montoyas'. As we talked we saw Goyo, Beasley's stable-boy, take the race-horse down the alley from the stable next door.

"Now where is he going this time of day?" Manuel rumbled. "It's late for his *patrón* to drive anywhere."

Something in what he said aroused my curiosity, and I followed. As I went down the alley I fancied an air of expectancy in the town. More people than usual were out in the plaza. I found the race-horse and run-about had stopped in front of Beasley's office. As I approached, Beasley himself came out. I couldn't hear his orders to Goyo, who started driving the race-horse away. Beasley looked round, pleased, at the crowd. Tom Dold was on the other side of the street in front of the courthouse.

"If she won't race that fast horse of hers on the track, we'll have to do it on her own ground," Beasley called.

People were running towards New Town Road, and I followed. A few spectators already waited there when we reached it, and the number increased as the news got abroad. A spirited air pervaded most of the spectators, but uneasiness, I thought, could be felt among the sheep people, and this was my own feeling.

Far up the road I could see Goyo driving slowly north. Not a sign of another horse or rig as far as my eyes could reach. Maybe she won't

come, I said to myself hopefully, and walked north on the road to see what I could see. Finally, far up the road, I thought I saw a puff of dust rising.

Pas Ramírez was the first to identify it. "It's her—*la doña*," he said, adding the latter out of respect to me.

I couldn't be sure, but, as we went on and the speck came towards us, my eyes finally made out the yellow-topped buggy. I knew the horse must be Critter, probably trotting a little faster on the way home. Alone in the seat would be Ellen, unsuspecting what lay ahead. As she approached we saw Goyo, still travelling towards her, look over his shoulder as if measuring the distance back to town. He drew the racer to a walk as the yellow-topped buggy came close.

Hardly had the two rigs passed when Goyo swung the chestnut round. He waited until Ellen's buggy must have been a hundred yards in front. Then we thought we saw him shake the reins and the race-horse started to come from behind. We were not close enough to see, but I could imagine Critter's ears pricking at the sound of hoofs overtaking him. All we definitely saw was Goyo pulling out to the left to go round, and then the two horses side by side and neither one passing, by which we knew they had started to run.

"*Mira!* Here they come!" Pas Ramírez yelled.

Those were the days of no fences. The road lay across the prairie and was as wide as you chose to make it. Looking at the horses from in front, we had no idea how fast they were coming. Only in the nick of time did we recognize our danger. We got off the road just as they went by. I had a glimpse of Critter, the bit between his teeth, that stubborn forward look on his head and neck, and of Ellen looking helpless and exasperated in the buggy, sawing vainly on the lines to hold him, while half a length behind him the race-horse tore on, his mane and tail streaming, Goyo half raised from the seat, the whip in his hand.

Once they were by, all we could see was a cloud of dust. By the time we reached town, they were far beyond. I had a glimpse of Beasley turning away darkly towards his office while the Mexicans chattered in great animation and the sheep-men looked solidly pleased.

We learned afterwards that never for a moment had Goyo been able to get round the yellow-topped buggy, that at the outskirts of town



Ellen was almost a length ahead, with Critter still going like such a torrent that he was half-way to the railway tracks before Ellen could stop him. When I reached the buggy, Ellen, white and shaken, was driving slowly back.

"You devil!" she was saying angrily to Critter as she stopped to let me in.

"He was wonderful," I told her.

"He's a stubborn, vain, unprincipled brute!" she answered. "I could kill him with good grace."

We saw a knot of people up round the court-house waiting for her to drive back, but to my disappointment she turned up a side street to avoid them. I protested.

"They saw Critter come in ahead and that's enough," she insisted. "They shouldn't have seen that much. There was no occasion for a race at this time and no decency in it. They should know it."

DESPITE Ellen's anger over the race, it did her good, I think. Her victory over Beasley softened, if faintly, some of her bitterness against him. She felt more resigned. By the autumn, it seemed that the agitation over Cousin Albert's and Willy's disappearance had begun to blow over. Then word arrived that a sheep-herder in a remote corner of Baca County had seen a cow-boy riding Dan, one of Cousin Albert's horses. Salomón Baca, owner of the sheep, had taken his herder to town to swear out an affidavit. A few nights later the herder was killed. A warrant had been issued for the cow-boy and Beasley had been engaged to defend him.

Now things were all stirred up again. The incident was on everyone's lips, reviving the earlier tragedy. Hardly had all this happened when word came that a body had been discovered. That evening Amado Martínez called at the house and was closeted with Ellen. When the sheriff left, he patted my shoulder. Ellen had then come out.

"I have news for you, Jud," she said. "They've found your father."

My face must have gone white, for she led me to one of the couches and put her arm round me. She told me quietly all the sheriff had said to her. The body had been found in a high canyon in the Greenhorn Mountains, where it had lain covered by snow most of the year.

Apparently he had been taken there alive, murdered, and the money stolen. They were bringing the body back to Mpro now.

"Don't worry. Your father will have Christian burial. I'll see Reverend Crandall myself in the morning."

All the while she minister read the burial service over the simple pine coffin, her mind, I think, was on the bodies of Cousin Albert and Willy, still unbound.

There were those who said that Ellen Sessions had refused to wear mourning for her husband and son but had put it on for the father of her cousin by marriage: This was unadulterated nonsense. My father's death and burial had only brought home to her the shocking realities of Willy's and Cousin Albert's disappearance. Now she felt she had no other way than to accept them as dead and all it implied. She wore no mourning at my father's funeral. The day afterwards she took the train to Denver to buy materials, and, when she came back, called the dress-makers in.

She looked thinner and if anything more beautiful in black the morning she asked me to stay home from school. "I want to call on Mr. Beasley," she told me. "I haven't discussed the matter with Tom or anyone, but I feel I would like to have a witness. You're the only son I have now, Jud, and I wish you to come."

Ellen seemed calm enough, but there was with it a certain sad and bitter dedication which she had never before affected. Much would I have given to get out of going with her to the lawyer's office, but the way she looked at me, I felt a dependence that made me more of a man. To my surprise, Manuel was waiting outside with Critter and the buggy. We could easily have walked the short distance. At the dusty brick building opposite the court-house I leapt out and helped her down. Then, without knocking, Ellen went into the office and I followed.

My first impression was the strong stale scent of tobacco. I saw George Steffy, Beasley's young assistant, look up in surprise. Behind him, through the sliding doors, I had a glimpse of a deeper and more dangerous region. This Ellen at once entered.

There was nothing for me to do except push after. I found we were in a large room with shelves. One whole wall was lined with yellow



leather books, and on the other hung framed pictures. In the corner was a great flat-topped desk piled with documents and books, and behind the desk the thick form and powerful face of Willy's Uncle Snell. He didn't lift his face, but his eyes peered up, almost squinted, as if to say, who is this?—the fierce large eye and the smaller drooping one, which I had heard referred to as his "little bitty eye." I didn't know which one frightened me more.

Ellen seated herself on the edge of a chair and regarded him for a few moments. "I've come in peace, Snell, to ask a favour."

She said it humbly, almost abased, but I saw it didn't appease her brother-in-law. Ellen seemed aware of this. She went on.

"I want to ask if you will speak to your clients for me. I mean the cattle-men in Baca County. I don't want to know who was involved in

this terrible thing or any detail of what happened. All I ask of them is to let me know where the bodies of Willy and Albert may be found so that I can bring them to Moro, have them decently buried and the Christian service read over them."

It seemed a small and deserving request to me, but I noticed no answering pity in his eyes. "And you feel my cattle-men clients should be able to tell you that?" he asked.

"I do," Ellen answered.

"Perhaps you feel that I myself might be able to tell you?"

"God forbid," Ellen said so low I could scarcely hear her.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Just God forbid," she repeated.

To my dismay, an expression of righteous indignation gripped him at her reply. The lower part of his face twitched.

"You say you come in peace and then insult me by your aspersions." He spoke in a surprisingly calm and controlled voice. "First let me point out that there is not the slightest proof that your boy and husband are dead as you assume, let alone murdered and hidden in the wilderness as you insinuate. Secondly, you assume that the perpetrators of such a gross and hideous crime are my own clients who could tell you where the bodies are, if they wished, and that this makes me either a dupe ignorant of the true nature of my clients or a confederate equally guilty with them of murder. Thirdly, you set up this imaginary set of circumstances and accusations and forget that if these grossly improbable things were true it would still be you and your husband who by persecution of other human beings brought the final culmination to pass."

If he had stopped there, I thought he might have had something, but he carried on, his little eye twinkling like a dark star.

"Finally, you seem to have overlooked the report, which from association with you I must respect, that Albert has long been weary of your efforts to dominate and influence his judicial acts, so that finally he had no other course than to abandon you."

Ellen rose to her feet.

"That's a lie, Snell, and you know it."

He looked at her with satisfaction that was positively evil.

"The truth is great and shall prevail," he quoted. " 'Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small.' For a long time you have been riding high. You have done what you liked and been above the law. You have manipulated the law in the cases of others, causing in the end the ruin of your brother, your husband and son. Now you will have to face justice and reformed conditions. No longer can you dictate to the bench."

Ellen's cheeks were flat white.

"Are you going to get me the information, Snell, so that Albert's and Willy's bodies can be brought home and decently buried?"

He gazed at her with baneful delight.

"I have told you that I know nothing, that my clients know nothing. Now I will add that, on the contrary, did my clients know something and had they given me the information in the priestly confidence that exists between an honourable lawyer and his client, I would tell you nothing, and the courts would sustain me."

He was a devil, the very devil himself, I thought. For a little while Ellen stood shocked and trembling. Then she took my arm and we left. Critter and the yellow-topped buggy were waiting. I helped her in. We drove off. She said no word to me on the way home, not until she reached the door of the house.

"I hoped it could be done without further bloodshed, Jud, but now I see he must be dealt with as the dog he is."

"Cousin Ellen, don't!" I begged, following her into the house.

"What, Jud?" she asked quietly.

"I don't know," I stammered.

Her eyes probed mine.

"I'm glad you came with me, Jud. When you are young, you feel the world is good and troubles can always be avoided. But it's better to know that life may be inescapable, that you may finally get to a point where you can no longer live honourably, when the dead cry out for justice but nobody will administer it and you've got to attend to it yourself."

I didn't know fully what she meant, but I knew enough. As she disappeared behind the door, I had a moment's glimpse of her room, the carved chest of drawers and wardrobe, the Brussels carpet on the floor,

the polished French brass bed, a painted fragile china lamp on a stand. All was very feminine except for one jarring note. In the far corner beside the bed I had the glimpse of an object from the ranch. Only the barrel was visible above the elaborate bed-cover, but it was enough. I knew that ever since Charley had been shot she had kept a pearl-handled revolver lying on the marble-topped table at the head of her bed. Now I was aware that she must have brought her light rifle to town.

Ellen didn't appear for lunch or dinner that day. This was most unusual. Even on the day the news had come about Cousin Albert and Willy, she had not taken to her room. I hoped that Dr. Gammel or Tom Dold or some of her other friends might come this evening, but no one called.

"How is she?" I asked Chepa when she brought out the tray that evening.

"She just walks the room. She is like a *leona*," Chepa said.

That evening there was something about my room that gave me an unpleasant feeling. I looked out of the window. Then I knew what it was.

Light shone in the Beasley home next door, especially in the room opposite Ellen's bedroom. I could see just the top of the window. Before the wall had been put up Willy and I had often watched his Uncle Snell sitting in this room. Invariably he was at his desk under the light of a green-shaded oil lamp. The same coloured light came from the window tonight. Standing on the bed, I could peer over the wall and see him sitting at the desk now, going over a pile of papers.

Ellen's room was next to mine. From the absence of light falling on our side of the wall, I could tell that it was in darkness. And yet from time to time I thought I heard her moving about.

I couldn't lie still, but had to stand up on my hard Mexican bed and stare at the black target of Beasley sitting at his desk. I would stand a long time, rigid, waiting, listening, until from sheer weariness I would lie down again.

Once when I pushed back the clothes and stood up, the light from Beasley's window was gone. The brick house was dark, the windows dim and silent. I lay down, gratefully closed my eyes and let sleep overtake me.

## CHAPTER 8

I SELDOM saw Ellen now until noon. She stayed in the seclusion of her room. When she came out at last, I was always shocked at what I saw. This was not the Ellen I knew. She looked ~~as~~ if she hadn't slept, as if she had had a battle most of the night.

Nights were bad for me, too. I thought what a relief it would be to leave the tragic white house and go to the ranch. Out there I felt I could sleep untroubled by every stir and creaking. I spoke of it to her, but she would shake her head and something would come into her face. "No, Jud, I can't. Not yet."

Several times when I heard Chepa or Epifania going in or out of her room, I tried to post myself where I would get a glimpse inside. I wanted to see if the rifle was still there, but I was never quick enough.

Tom Dold and the doctor called nearly every day. I know Tom asked her to marry him, and I felt that the doctor had always wanted her. But she was impatient with them both.

"Why do some men talk too much?" she asked me once. "It's a woman's art and right. A man should sit quietly and let a woman do the talking. He should be warmed and refreshed by it. And if the woman is in no mood to talk, he should be sympathetic and silent. But I must listen to Tom Dold and the doctor reciting all the petty doings of the court, especially of Snell Beasley, and all the stories going the rounds. Half of them they've told me before."

The third of the faithful trio who came to see her was Father Goshard, the big gaunt Belgian. He liked young people and usually asked me to stay in the *sala* when he called. Ellen seldom treated him with the pious reverence shown him by most of her people. The first time I heard them together I feared he would be offended, but soon I saw that he took delight in her attitude towards him as an equal and in her quick readiness to give her opinion on the most sacred of matters.

Once after they had disputed back and forth for an hour, Ellen turned to me. "It's not in me to let any man get the upper hand of me, Jud, not even my saintly and dogmatic spiritual father."

The priest seemed heartily to enjoy her unpredictable contradictions.



But he did not laugh at her bitterness over the impunity of Snell Beasley. "Why should he still be alive after what happened to Albert and Willy?" she asked once.

"Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord."

"Then why are there public trials and executions?" she asked quickly. "Why not leave it all to God?"

"There is the duty of serving the established courts of law and order," the priest said. "And there is taking the law into our own hands, serving the baser passions in our own breasts."

"I fight," Ellen said in a low voice. "But it goes hard and takes very long."

"My yoke is easy, and my burden is light," the priest quoted. "You are young. There is still peace and happiness for you."

"If you refer to another marriage some time, Father, it could never be even if I wished it," she said. "I'll never really know if Albert is dead."

The old priest watched her. "Why don't you submit to the will of God, child?" he asked. "Where and by what means Judge Sessions and Willy came to leave this life, we don't know. But the fact of their departure is evident to all. It's better to accept it. You put your faith not in God, but in rumours," he chided. "I hear these rumours, too. Somebody has seen the judge or Willy in California or Wyoming or Old Mexico—mostly in Old Mexico. They are living or kept there now against their will. It takes money to investigate these rumours. I hear someone is always travelling far for you at your expense."

"What is money beside the lives of those you love?" she asked.

"There are many rumours in the world and little truth in any of them, child. Their only vitality is in the hope they arouse. When they prove false, there is bitter disappointment and renewal of hatred."

"That's true, Father," Ellen admitted. "But if someone tells me he has seen Albert or Willy alive, I can't sit idly by and do nothing. They may need me. And I can't sit idly by when my own brother-in-law defends the man seen with one of Albert's horses and who murdered the sheep-herder who testified to it."

"Have no fear, child," the priest said, "God will not defend the wicked. The courts will never acquit him."



That's what we had all thought. It was a shock when word came that the Baca County jury, putty in Beasley's hands, had freed the cow-boy seen riding Cousin Albert's horse.

I was standing in the alley looking gloomily at the house next door and wondering how it would all end when I saw a hand beckon me from the Beasley stable. Walking closer, I saw it again. The doors were open. Beasley's run-about and sulky were both there, the shafts up against the wall, the racer in his stall, but Goyo, the stable-boy, was out somewhere. I wondered what I had seen. Then Felicitas stepped out from behind the steps as I went in.

"Here," she said, swiftly coming to me and taking a small bunch of flowers from under her apron. She held them out to me.

"For Willy," she said in a low voice.

"Willy's dead," I said harshly.

"I know," she told me.

For a moment I considered taking the flowers from her hand and throwing them on the manure pile, but in the end I took them to Ellen, saying they were for Willy from Felicitas. For the first time for days I saw Ellen's face soften. She poured water from her bedroom pitcher and set the flowers in a vase on the marble-topped table in her room.

*Gracias á Dios*, Chepa used to say, that we mortals never know what is ahead for us. Now I have heard Mexicans speak otherwise, especially old sheep-herders who had spent their lives reading the sky and range. They insist that the future is written down for us, every whit, that there are



always signs. Fidel, the wisest man on the ranch, used to answer, yes, of course, it is all written down, but who can read the handwriting of *el Dios*? As for signs, who knows for sure what they mean until he can look back and see what they portended by the things that came to pass?

What was destined to happen is all to be found today in dusty files. First came the heavy winter snowfall that turned the range the following summer into a garden for those sheep that hadn't been smothered by the snow. Then, like the lean years in Egypt after the fat years, came the great drought. For some twenty months no snow or rain worthy of the name fell.

But the worst was not yet, not until after the national elections. I remember going to the station for Ellen to get the latest returns. Cleveland, if elected, had promised to exempt foreign wool from tariff duties. What happened is history, but the interpretation is something else. I have heard it argued endlessly; some claimed it was the free wool that brought the panic of '93, others that it was the drought. All I know is that wool dropped to seven cents a pound, in some cases to five cents, that sheep sold for a dollar apiece, and that such a time of ruin and wretchedness ensued over the territory as I never saw before or since. The only good I knew it to do was to bring an end to Ellen's mourning over Willy and Cousin Albert. "Thank God they are not living now!" more than once she told me.

Energies that had lain dormant or been dammed up in her so long began to be released again in their natural channels. I remember her especially the following spring on the ranch, which by now had become a ghastly place. The great Johnson y Campo lamb crop, once a rich source of income, had turned into a cruel liability. As they were born, lambs had to be killed to save their mothers. Here Ellen was the *patrona* again, and I can still hear her voice heartening the discouraged lambers, the range around them desolate with dust and dead sheep under a pitiless sky.

The lambing was scarcely over when Mama Grande died. "She knew better days. These were hard for her to take," Ellen told me. "She is better off out of this kind of world!"

But if Mama Grande was better off, Ellen wasn't. Just the sight of Beasley, when he arrived for the funeral, brought up all I had heard of

him lately—that there was no holding him, that these were times ripe for him and his kind. He was making a great fortune for himself, perhaps the largest in the territory, calling in notes, foreclosing, buying ranches for little or nothing.

He came to the ranch alone driving his race-horse, which he ordered Teófilo to put up, almost as if he himself were the *patrón*. He met Ellen coolly.

“Your sister hasn’t been too well,” he said. “I thought it best if she were spared the ordeal of the funeral.”

“I’m sorry for Ana’s sake that she didn’t come. All of us have only one mother,” Ellen said.

He gave that cool look of his, hinting without words or details of things still to come. I watched him at the funeral and afterwards, not mingling with the mourners but striding about, asking sharp questions of the peons, inspecting the ranch buildings, finally ordering his horse and buggy and driving off with no good-bye.

In the days that followed I was worried. I knew that Ellen was hard hit. She had spent thousands trying to solve the mystery of Cousin Albert and Willy. Most of it she had borrowed. Now for some time banks and private lenders had been calling in their notes. Money was hard to get. Ellen was forced to sell thousands of sheep to the packing houses, and the pitifully small price per head was quickly swallowed up in interest and running expenses. I had hoped that Mama Grande’s death might leave enough to pay Ellen’s debts, but all she left was her share in the ranch, evenly divided between her two surviving daughters, and this brought not a dollar to Ellen.

The singular thing was that Ellen seemed unworried. The worse her situation, the more her debtors hounded her, the more it seemed to mend the deep wounds of her unsolved tragedy, to help her believe that perhaps Willy’s and Albert’s deaths were for the best after all.

She and Critter were inseparable again. She drove him and her yellow-topped buggy everywhere, to the ranch to manage what she had left, to her creditors to appease and stave them off, to her old Mexican family friends to borrow a little so that she might hold on until better times returned. It all agreed with her. Activity was her nature. I never saw her looking better.

When Mr. Kidd offered me a job at the commission house, I jumped at the chance. It meant I could contribute a little towards our expenses of living, although I knew I never dare mention this to Ellen. When I told her I wanted to take the job, she gave her consent reluctantly. "But you must never leave me, Jud," she said. "Remember, this house is yours as long as you live."

It was like a breath of fresh air and a new life to leave the gloomy old white *casa* for the commission house, if only in the daytime. I found the commission-house clan a big jolly family, patronizing the same restaurant and dance hall, taking the same train to Trinidad on holidays, playing tricks on one another and especially on me, the newest member.

And yet through all my daily life in this hive of commerce, I couldn't shut out the ugly day-by-day reports from the panic-ridden range, the sad things that were happening to others and which inevitably must engulf Ellen and the old Johnson y Campo name. The tragic part was that men still had to fight for their existence when times at last had begun to improve. The cycle had turned. Rain was already falling on the range, new grass appearing. Wool and lamb prices had steadied. The worst was over and most ranchers had begun to breathe hopefully again.

That was when Beasley played his hand. All through the months of drought and panic when expenses were heartbreaking and income nonexistent or trifling, he let Ellen struggle with Rancho Zelandia. But once the hardest times were over and recovery and profit began to appear, then in the name of his half-owner wife he entered suit, filing a bill in equity, citing mismanagement, neglect, and non-payment of interest and principal on Ellen's notes which he had bought up in his wife's name, demanding an accounting, a receivership, and public sale of the ranch's real and personal property.

He entered the suit swiftly and without warning while court was still in session, and Judge Saxton put it through at the end of the term. Tom Dold struggled manfully, but he was no match for the weight of debt. Ellen had neither cash nor collateral left to fight Beasley; moreover, she refused to testify on any allegation that would make her sister out to be a liar. "That's Snell, not Ana, speaking," was all she would say.

Even if Judge Saxton had not owed his appointment to Beasley's influence, he would have had little choice in the matter. The famous old Johnson y Campo ranch and stock, including the Spanish grant, were put on the block and bought by Beasley for less than fifty thousand, none of which would be divided with Ellen. Her share was to be paid to her sister on Ellen's unpaid debts.

I heard of the final blow at the commission house one afternoon. The same day Pas Ramírez, now a loader, cornered me against a car of outgoing wool.

"It is too bad, but she will fix him now?" he said.

"If you mean what I think you do, Pas," I told him, "you are dead wrong."

"No, you are the one who is wrong, *amigo*," he said. "Years ago the wolf howled for his due. But the Anglo in her waited, thinking the foolish Anglo thought that if you pet him the wolf will turn into a dog. Now he has everything and she has nothing. She will not let him take the ranch, the only thing she has left. She will fix him now like she fixed Frank Jeffcoat long ago."

I went home hating to face Ellen that evening, but friends had taken her home to dinner after the sheriff's sale. "She left a message for you," Chepa told me. "She must go out to the ranch tomorrow. It is the last time. You must go with her."

That day when I asked Mr. Kidd for leave, he gave me a look from under his black eyebrows and ordered me into his office.

"You know that this is the end of her and the ranch?" he asked.

"I'm afraid it is, sir."

"I suppose you think I should have given her a hand?"

"I didn't think about it, sir."

"Well, we carried her for some nineteen thousand dollars. I could have sold the debt to Beasley long ago at twenty cents on the dollar. I didn't then, although it looked at the time as though we'd never get a penny. Did you know that?"

"No, sir."

"Jud, do you know what a lady is?" he went on.

"Yes, sir. I think I do."

"I don't think you do. A lady is a woman of great charm or position

or both who because of it has never had to do anything for herself but has always had somebody to do it for her. Did you ever think of that before?"

"No, sir."

"Well, it's time you understood some of these things. Ellen was a Johnson y Campo. If there was a Campo who had more than she had, I never heard of it. She was born to the purple, to the ranch, to the family name, and money. There was always something or somebody to take care of her. When she was young, it was her father. When Frank Jeffcoat ruined her garden and one of them shot him, she had her brother Charley to fall back on. When Charley was tried, she had Albert to free him and to convict his murderers when they came to trial for another crime. Now Albert and Charley are gone. Her father and mother are gone. The ranch and her money are gone. She needs someone more than ever, somebody to take up her cause, solve her problems, and take care of her. There she is, attractive, beautiful, worldly. Tom Dold is a gentleman, but he's not your Cousin Albert by a long shot. There's nobody left to come to her rescue any more."

I kept thinking about it on the way to the ranch next morning with Ellen: The mesa had never looked more beautiful, the air like wine, the Prietas crystal clear, and the ranch headquarters, when we came to it, like the capital of some small empire. It had rained during the night and the Johnson y Campo range looked fresh and green.

It was an ordeal. As we came up to the portal, one of the doors opened and Snell Beasley, thick, active, all business, appeared.

"You can come in," he said curtly, and I looked to see how Ellen liked being invited into her own house. She gave no sign, entering the familiar *sala* almost as a visitor, seating herself presently in the chair Beasley indicated, as if this house was not part of her, as if she hadn't been born in one room and spent much of her life in the others.

"I had hoped Ana would be here," she said quietly.

"No," Beasley answered. Then as if something in her remark had nettled him, he went on sharply: "Before we get to the few things you may claim, I want to tell you that I might have claimed a good deal more. We could have taken everything you have, the house in town and your horse and buggy."

All she said was a low "Thank you."

"No," he said heartily, "we don't want your house now or your horse. He's getting on in years. I have a better one. Now shall we get down to business?"

All through the scenes that followed I marvelled at Ellen. How could she give up all this so calmly? What was going on in her head? Was she really the gentlewoman taking her humiliation with good grace? Or could she be waiting, as Pas implied, seeing how far he would go, which would give her final violent act all the more reason and sympathy? Without some planned solution in her mind, I felt she couldn't control herself like this.

In the end she told me to carry some small things to the buggy. She asked her brother-in-law to deliver the rest with Teófilo.

"Now we must go, Jud," she said.

First she drove round the ranch headquarters, the lambing pens, the chapel, then to the edge of the cedars where Willy and I used to ride. She was taking a last look at everything.

"Look," she said once, "I don't need to touch a line. Critter knows where to go."

It was true. Critter seemed to know. He went to the cemetery and beyond it to a spot where the whole property could be seen spread out before us with the Greenhorn Mountains a white crown to the north.

When we returned to the ranch-house, the Mexicans were waiting for us. I saw again how charming Ellen could be with servants, peons, children, those who looked up to her. She stepped down from the buggy to shake every hand, had a word in Spanish for each, an act that caused many of them, especially older men and women, to break down and fall on their knees, kissing her hand or skirt.

What Beasley must have thought if he watched from the window I have no idea. But as we drove up through the canyon I bled for her. I began to see more clearly what Mr. Kidd had said, that always she had had this great ranch behind her, someone to espouse her cause and solve her problems. All she had now were a house in town, an old horse, and a young stripling like me.

As for Critter, he seemed as weary as I. I noticed that he dragged. It was true he had already travelled from town to ranch that day, but

there had been a time when twenty miles would scarcely have laid a hair on him. I mentioned this to Ellen.

"He's older," she said. "But not really old. He's younger than Willy. They were born almost on the same day two years apart."

Just the way she said it made me glance at her. She sat there on the faded cushions of her yellow-topped buggy, erect, well dressed as always, her little green hat with the feather jaunty, her driving gloves open at the wrist and flaring.

"We're all older," I said.

"He says you're older, boy," she said.

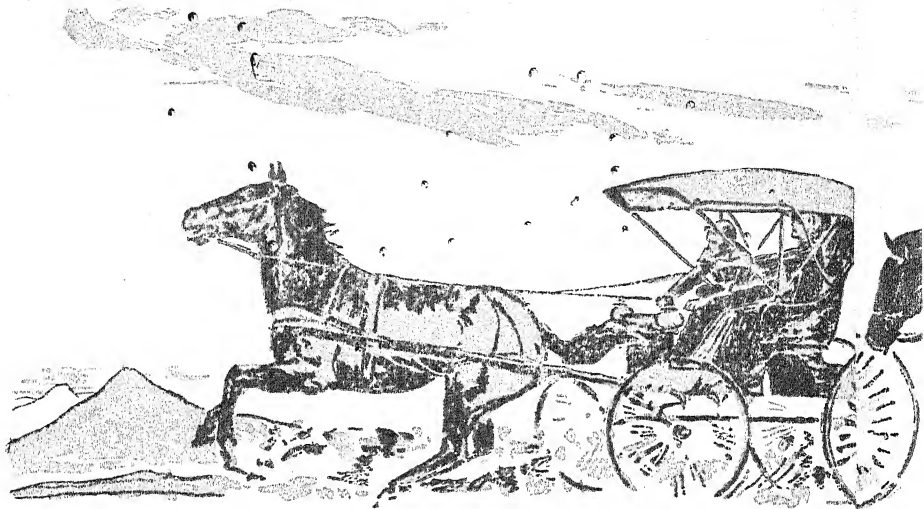
At the sound, Critter broke at once into a faster pace, but presently slowed again to his old trot. We were well on the mesa when I glanced back and saw another rig behind us, just emerging from the canyon. Farther out I looked again. It was almost the same distance behind us as before. Whoever it was showed no disposition to close the gap between. But later when I looked back I thought the rig was definitely nearer and that the horse looked like Beasley's.

Ellen didn't look back at all. We were on the almost level part of the mesa when I thought I heard a steel shoe strike a stone. Glancing again, I saw the rig closer behind us now and coming fast. It was definitely the run-about and the racer with Beasley himself driving. I'm sure Critter heard the sound, too. His ears had pricked and his pace increased. Ellen heard it now and looked over her shoulder.

Afterwards she told Tom and me that her first impulse had been to turn Critter directly off the road to the north. She guessed at once, as did I, that Beasley had chosen the spot to race, that he was unsatisfied with taking the ranch and sheep, that now with the town just ahead of us in plain view across the river he intended to beat her horse and take the only laurels she had left. For a moment, she told us, she hesitated to humiliate Critter, make him show the white feather, and by the time she had made up her mind it was too late. Critter had definitely accepted the challenge.

I had been in races behind Critter before and have been in others since, but there was something about this one that troubled me from the start. It was Critter who moved me the most, no longer the pet but the old servitor unwilling to admit his years.

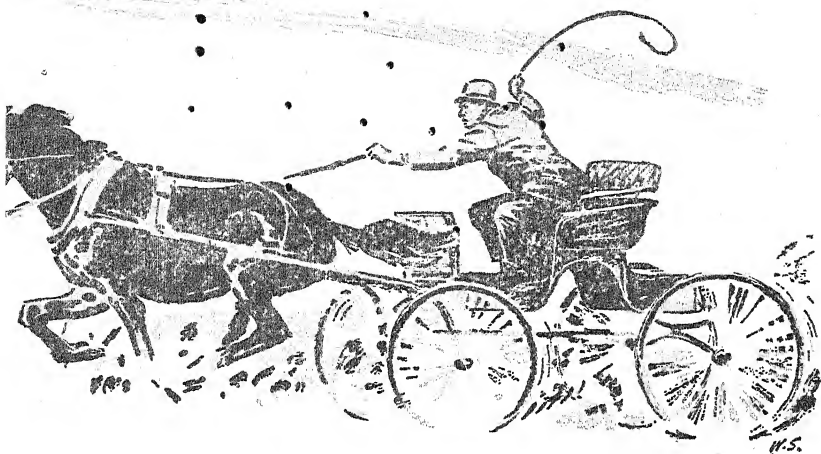




Some men mellow as they age, leave the fires of manhood behind them and handle better than in their youth. Critter was none of these. Ellen knew it, I'm sure. I had seen her half stand at the lines before, but never her body weight and strength so thrown against the bit. But there was no stopping him today more than any other time. He had the will to go, and there was nothing to do but let him have his way.

I did feel that Critter had the advantage of the road. The racer would have to take the rougher ground beside it. Critter's mane and tail were streaming and yet as we went on something in him fell short. I remembered his old effortlessness, when he seemed to fly like a road-runner, half on the ground, half in the air. Today he seemed to run as fast as he ever did, but the magic of easy power was lacking. I could feel the undercurrents of exertion, striving and strain.

Slowly but steadily the racer pulled up beside him. When he was younger, the near approach of the other horse would have been the signal for Critter to let loose a burst of speed that would have left his rival far behind. Now it was apparent that Critter had already given his best.



I had a glimpse of Beasley squatting forward on his light run-about seat, his arm's outstretched. As he came abreast he flicked his whip and the chestnut started pulling ahead.

"Help me, Jud!" Ellen suddenly panted.

She was having trouble with the right-hand line, I noticed, and the moment I took hold of it with her, I knew why she had called me. Critter was pulling hard towards his rival. I used both hands but without effect. We might as well be pulling on a locomotive. Never had he let a horse past him, and he wouldn't now. With a furious *syerve* that carried us with him like match-sticks he threw himself against the chestnut and all was lost in a crashing of buggies and bodies and horses upturned with their legs in the air.

They said afterwards that a dozen people in Moro watched the race. In almost no time riders and rigs were hurrying to the scene. What had happened they couldn't tell from town, but they knew it was bad. What they found was a boy with a broken arm, a woman with a scarred and bleeding face, one horse still on the ground, the other standing quietly by in broken shafts, his only sign of disaster the brown dirt smeared on

his sweated hide. That was the racer, but his driver lay under the overturned run-about, and when strong hands righted it he still lay unmoving. Ellen waited till Dr. Gammel finished with him.

"Look at Critter!" then she begged him, which he did.

"He's done for. The broken shaft hooked him. The kindest thing you can do for him is let me shoot him and put him out of his misery."

Such a look of blinding anger came into Ellen's eyes that I thought the doctor quailed.

"I would shoot you first, George!" she told him, and sent to town for Manuel.

We stayed until Manuel came and got Critter up on his unsteady feet. Then we drove down with Tom Dold in his buggy. People on the plaza watched silently as we drove by. When we reached La Placita, a little group stood in front of the Beasley house.

"I must go to Ana first," Ellen said.

I followed with my arm in a rough splint. Tom Dold and the doctor helped her up the steps. She did not knock. One of them opened the door for her and she went in. I had a glimpse of Ana surrounded by Beasley's friends and their wives. What would happen now I had no notion. But when Ana looked up and saw Ellen, it was as if no one but they were in the room. A strange nameless cry rose from each of them, and the two sisters ran into each other's arms. Tears flowed from them both. It was the first time I had seen Ellen cry.

It was strange that at a time like this I should remember what Mr. Kidd had said, that Ellen's deliverers were all gone, that there was no one left to come to her rescue any more, and yet here she was, delivered in the arms of her only sister, the widow of probably the richest man in the territory.

I wish it were possible to add that Willy and Cousin Albert came back. For years I kept saying to myself, it can't end like this—they will surely turn up some day. But they never did. Their bodies were never found. Only the whispering wind knows where they lie, for those unknown men involved in it must be dead today. Now, looking back over sixty years, I feel this may be the reason why the unsolved mystery remains to many of us the most haunting of earlier happenings in the annals of New Mexico.

*Conrad Richter*



CONRAD RICHTER was born in Pennsylvania in 1890, the son, grandson, nephew and great-nephew of clergymen. It was intended that he should study for the ministry, but on his graduation from high school he went to work, taking such varied jobs as drover, farmer, timberman and reporter.

In 1928 he and his small family moved to New Mexico, which soon captured his heart and mind. Many men and women who had lived through the eventful frontier days were still alive, and these he sought out, to draw from them authentic material for a shelf of notebooks. From then onward he devoted himself, with growing success, to fiction. He is the author of such well-known works as *The Town* (winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 1951), *The Sea of Grass* and *The Trees*.

# THE



*Illustrations by Francis Marshall*

# SCAPEGOAT

*A condensation of the book by*  
DAPHNE DU MAURIER



"The Scapegoat" is published by Victor Gollancz, London

WHAT WOULD it be like to change places with someone—actually to take on his identity—when he has lived in a desperate tangle of frustrated emotions, business problems and family strife? This is the very situation in which a solitary lecturer in French, tricked by a stranger in France who is his identical double, finds himself in this gripping story.

Miss du Maurier's masterly hand leads the reader breathlessly as the new family is met and unravelled, and exposure narrowly avoided. Ultimately revolutionary changes are made in the warped lives of several people, and the absorbing masquerade ends as unpredictably as it began. . . .

"A brilliantly told romantic thriller with some great philosophical truths."

—Nancy Spain in the *Daily Express*

"Daphne du Maurier is a spellbinder in the grand manner."

—John Davenport in *The Observer*



## CHAPTER 1

I LEFT the car by the side of the cathedral and walked down the steps into the Place des Jacobins. It was still raining hard. It had not once let up since Tours, and all I had seen of the countryside I loved was the gleaming surface of the *route nationale*, rhythmically cut by the monotonous swing of the windscreen-wiper.

Outside Le Mans, the depression that had grown upon me during the past twenty-four hours had intensified. The notes I had written for the lectures I was to give in London during the coming autumn were scholarly, precise, with dates and facts that I should afterwards dress up in language designed to strike a spark in the dull minds of inattentive students. But even if I held their flagging interest, I should know, when I had finished, that nothing I had said to them was of any value. The real meaning of history would have escaped me, because I had never been close enough to people.

My realization that I had achieved nothing in life, that all I had ever done was to watch people, never to partake of their happiness or pain, brought such a sense of overwhelming depression that when I came to Le Mans, although I had not intended to stop there and lunch, I changed my mind, hoping to change my mood.

It must have been one of the big market days, for the Place was



full of country people. Two black-shawled women argued beside an open cart, one of them holding a squawking hen, while towards them came a hulking fellow, his face purple with good cheer from a nearby bistro, grumbling as he peered down at the few coins in his hand. Three men prodded a bullock towards a lorry, pricking his flanks with a hay-fork. I walked past the lorry and across the Place to the *brasserie* at the corner, and then suddenly the pale sun shone from the fitful sky, and the people thronging the Place, who had seemed black smudges in the rain, became animated blobs of colour, smiling, gesticulating, strolling about their business with new leisure as the sky fell apart, turning the dull day to gold.

The *brasserie* was crowded, the atmosphere thick with the good smell of food—of cheese upon sauce-tipped knives, spilt wine and the bitter dregs of coffee—the whole scene framed in a blue-smoke cloud of Gauloise cigarettes. I found a seat in the far corner near the service door, and as I ate an omelet the swing-door kept bursting backward, forward, pushed impatiently by waiters with trays piled high with food. The woman who ate beside me expostulated to her sister upon the cost of living, ignoring the pallid little girl who sat on the husband's knee. As I listened my former depression returned. I was an alien, I was not one of them. Years of study, the fluency with which I spoke their language and taught their history had never brought me closer to the people





themselves. The urge to know was with me, and the ache. The smell of the soil, the faded paint of shutters masking windows through which I should never look, the grey faces of houses whose doors I should never enter were an everlasting reproach, a reminder of distance, of nationality. I should never be a Frenchman, never be one of them.

I paid, and went out, and walked aimlessly along the streets, my lack of purpose, my very clothes—grey flannel bags, well-worn tweed jacket—betraying me an Englishman in this jostling market-day crowd. The rain came spattering down again, sending the crowd to huddle in the shops; and suddenly, like a gulf of darkness swamping reason, I knew that later on I must get drunk, or die. How much did failure matter? Not, perhaps, to the few friends who thought they knew me well, not to the persons who employed me nor the students to whom I lectured,

who knew me as a law-abiding, quiet individual of thirty-eight, with no family, no ties, no entanglements. But to the self who clamoured for release, the man within?

Who he was, what urges and what longings he might possess, I could not tell. Perhaps if I had not kept him locked within me, he might have laughed and roistered—or spent himself on causes and loved humanity. I was so used to denying him expression that his ways were unknown to me. Whatever his nature, he always hovered beneath the insignificant façade of that pale self who now waited for the rain to cease, for the holiday to come to its appointed end, for the routine of his uneventful London life to close upon him again. The question was, what lever would set that other self free?

I thought of my map back in the car, and the blue circle with which I had marked the Cistercian monastery called the Abbaye de la Grande-Trappe. What did I expect to gain if I should go there? That the monks might have my answer, and the answer to the man within . . .

I was surprised to see the station ahead of me and, thinking I would have a drink at the buffet and come to some decision about la Grande-Trappe, I crossed the road. A car swerved to avoid me and then stopped. The driver leant out of the window and shouted in French, "Hullo, Jean, when did you return?"

The fact that my own name was John confused me. I thought that he must be someone I had met somewhere, and I called back, also in French, "I'm only passing through—I go back tonight."

"A wasted visit, I suppose," he said, "but you'll bluff them all at home into thinking it's been a success."

The remark was offensive. How on earth could he know about my deep personal sense of failure? Then I saw he was a stranger. "I beg your pardon," I said, "I'm afraid we have both made a mistake."

To my astonishment he laughed, winked broadly, and said, "All right, pretend I haven't seen you. But why do here in Le Mans what could be better done in Paris? I'll ask you when we meet again next Sunday." Laughing, he drove away.

I watched his car disappear, and turned into the crowded station buffet. Chattering travellers elbowed me from the counter. Whistles blew, dogs on leashes yapped, a child wailed.

Someone jolted my elbow as I drank and said, "*Je vous demande pardon,*" and as I moved to give him space he turned and stared at me and I at him, and I realized, with a strange sense of shock and fear and nausea all combined, that his face and voice were known to me too well. I was looking at myself. . . .

We did not speak: we went on staring at one another. I felt a chill down my spine, a desire to turn and run. Finally he said, "You don't happen to be the devil, by any chance?"

"I might ask you the same question," I replied.

"Here. . . ." He took me by the arm and pulled me closer to the counter, and although the mirror behind the bar was steamy, and partly hidden by bottles, it showed us plainly enough to be standing together, searching the mirrored surface as though our lives depended upon what it had to tell. And the answer was no chance resemblance, no superficial likeness: it was as though one man stood there. He said—and even the intonation sounded like my own—"I make it a rule never to be surprised by anything in life; there is no reason to make an exception now. What will you drink?"

I was too shaken to care. He asked for two *fines*, and we moved with one accord to the farther end of the counter, where the mirror was less steamy and the pushing crowd less dense.

We might have been two actors studying our make-up as we glanced from the looking-glass back to one another. He arranged his tie and I arranged mine; and we both drank our brandy at one gulp to see what we looked like drinking.

"Are you a man of fortune?" he asked.

"No," I said. "Why?"

"We might do an act at a circus, or make a million in a cabaret." He ordered two more *fines*. Nobody seemed surprised at the resemblance. "They think you're my twin brother here at the station to meet me," he said. "Perhaps you are. Where are you from?"

"London," I told him.

"What I mean is, what part of France do you come from?"

"I'm English. I happen to have made a study of your language."

He raised his eyebrows. "My compliments," he said. "I wouldn't have known you for a foreigner. What are you doing in Le Mans?"

I explained that I was in the last few days of holiday, that I gave lectures in England about his country and its past.

He looked amused. "Is that how you earn a living?"

"Yes."

"Are you married?"

"No. I have no family at all. I live alone."

"You're lucky." He spoke with emphasis, and raised his glass. "To your most fortunate freedom," he said. "Long may it last."

"What about you?" I asked.

"Me?" he said. "Oh, I can call myself a family man. Very much so, in fact. I was caught long ago."

"Are you a man of business too?"

"I own some property about thirty kilometres from here." He stared at his glass. "Are you stopping in Le Mans overnight?"

"I don't know. I haven't planned. As a matter of fact . . ." I paused. The brandy had given me a comfortable glow inside, and I had the impression that it would not matter what I said to this man; it would be like talking to myself. "As a matter of fact, I was thinking of spending a few days in la Grande-Trappe."

"For the love of God, why do you want to go there?"

His phrase was apt. The reason why men went to la Grande-Trappe was to find the love of God. Or so I supposed.

"I thought if I went," I said, "and stayed there before returning to England, I might find the courage to go on living."

He looked at me thoughtfully as he drank his *fine*.

"What's the trouble?" he asked. "A woman? Money? You have cancer?"

"No."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps you're a drunkard," he said, "or enjoy discomfort for its own sake. There must be something seriously wrong if you want to go to la Grande-Trappe."

I glanced beyond him to the mirror once again. And now, for the first time, I could see the difference between us. It was not the clothes, his dark travelling suit and my tweed jacket, which distinguished us; it was his ease of manner. He looked, and spoke, and smiled as I had never done.

"There's nothing wrong," I said. "It's just that, as an individual, I've failed in life."

"So have we all," he said. "The secret of life is to recognize the fact early on, and become reconciled."

He finished his drink and glanced at the clock on the wall.

"There is no need," he observed, "to go to la Grande-Trappe immediately. The good monks are waiting upon eternity, they can wait a few more hours for you. Let us go where we can drink in greater comfort, and perhaps dine, because, being a family man, I am in no great hurry to go home."

It was then that I remembered the man in the car who had spoken to me outside. "Are you called Jean?" I asked.

"Yes," he said, "Jean de Gué. Why?"

"Someone mistook me for you. He shouted, 'Hullo, Jean,' and when I told him he was mistaken he seemed amused, and obviously thought I didn't want to be recognized. He drove off laughing, calling out something about seeing me on Sunday."

"Oh yes. *La chasse* takes place then."

My words must have started a new train of thought, for his expression changed, as if a problem, not easy to solve, had thrust its way to the surface of his mind. He beckoned to a porter who was waiting patiently with a couple of valises outside the swing-door of the buffet.

"You have a car?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered. "I left it at the cathedral."

"Then if you don't mind giving room to my valises, we might fetch it and drive somewhere for dinner?"

"Certainly. Anywhere you say."

He tipped the porter, summoned a taxi and we drove away. It was odd, and like a dream. So often, dreaming, I was the shadow, watching myself take part in some action. I had the same lack of substance now, the same lack of will.

After a moment I glanced at him, half furtively, and saw that he was looking as furtively at me. Our eyes met, and instead of smiling instinctively, because of the bond of likeness, the sensation was unpleasant, like contact with danger. I turned away from him to gaze out of the window, and as the taxi swerved and pulled up by the cathedral the deep,

solemn bells sounded for the Angelus. It was a summons that never failed to move me. Tonight it rang like a challenge, loud and compelling, as we climbed from the taxi. Two or three people passed through the doors into the cathedral.

I went and unlocked the car, a Ford Consul. My companion looked at it with interest. As I stowed away his valises he asked me all sorts of questions about it, fingered the switches, felt the seats to test the springs, fiddled with the gears and finally asked, with a burst of enthusiasm, whether he might drive her.

"Certainly," I said. "You know this town better than I do."

He settled himself with assurance behind the wheel and I climbed in beside him. It turned out to be, by my rather cautious standard, a hair-raising ride. When he had jumped one set of lights, and forced a large Buick driven by an infuriated American into the side of the street, he proceeded to circle the town in order, so he explained, to try the car's pace. "You know," he said, "it amuses me enormously to use other people's possessions. It is one of life's greatest pleasures." I closed my eyes as we took a corner like a bob-sleigh.

"I was thinking," he went on, "of taking you to the only restaurant where it is possible to eat superbly, but I am known there, and somehow I feel that tonight I want to be without identity."

His words gave me the same sense of discomfort that I had experienced in the taxi. The likeness between us was not something that either of us wanted to show off in public.

He began to slow down as we approached the centre of the town. "Possibly," he said, "I will spend tonight at an hotel." He seemed to be thinking aloud. "After all, by the time we have dined, it will be rather late to telephone for Gaston to bring in the car. And anyway, they are not expecting me."

I have made the same sort of excuses myself to put off facing something unpleasant.

"And you," he said, "you may decide you do not want to go to la Grande-Trappe. You, too, could stay in an hotel."

His voice was odd. It was as though he was feeling his way towards some sort of agreement between us.

"Perhaps," I said. "I don't know."

He drove through the centre of the town until we came to a quarter where the buildings appeared grey and drab. He stopped the car in front of a shabby house above whose half-open door I saw the word HOTEL, in dim blue electric light.

"Sometimes," he said, "these places can be useful. One does not always want to run up against one's friends." He switched off the engine and opened the door. "Are you coming?" he said.

"I don't think so," I said. "You go inside and book your room if you want to. I'd rather dine first and then decide what to do."

"As you like," he said, shrugging, and I lit a cigarette and watched him push through the door into the hotel. The drinks I had had were beginning to take effect. Nothing that was happening had reality, and in a state of blurred confusion I asked myself what I was doing here. I wondered whether I should drive away, and so be rid of the whole encounter, which, fascinating at first, now seemed menacing, even evil. I was reaching for the switch when he returned.

"That's fixed," he said. "Come and eat. No need to take the car. I know of a place just round the corner."

I couldn't summon an excuse to be rid of him, and, despising my own weakness, I followed him along the street like a shadow. He led me to a place half restaurant, half bistro, in the next street. It was crowded with youths in coloured jerseys, singing and shouting, while a knot of older men, workmen, played some dice game at a table. He pushed his way with assurance through the turmoil, and we sat down at a table behind a battered screen.

The *patron* thrust an indecipherable menu into my hands, and a glass of wine was before me and a plate of soup I hadn't ordered, for the ceiling was now merging with the floor and time losing significance, and my companion was leaning across the table, his glass raised, saying, "To your sojourn at la Grande-Trappe." His voice, so like an echo of my own, prodded me into confession: I found myself talking about loneliness, death, the empty shell of my personal world. "Surely at la Grande-Trappe," I heard my voice saying, "where men live by silence, they must have an answer to this, for they have deliberately gone into darkness to find light. Or, if they cannot give the answer, they can tell me where to look for it."



"My friend," he said, "if you knew as much about religion as I do you would run from it like the plague. I have a sister who thinks of nothing else. I have learned one thing in life: that the only motive force in human nature is greed. The thing to do is to minister to the greed, to give people what they want. The trouble is, they are never satisfied." He poured himself another glass of wine. "You complain that your life is empty," he said, in a new, hard voice, "To me it sounds like paradise. No family ties, no business worries, the whole of London a playground, if you wish."

There was resentment in his eyes, and exasperation—he too had his personal problem which he did not wish to face.

"It's your turn for the confessional," I said. "What's your trouble?"

I thought for a moment that he might be going to tell me. Something wavered in his eyes, a flicker of uncertainty, then it was gone again and in its stead the tolerant smile, the lazy shrug.

"Oh, me!" he said. "My one trouble is that I have too many possessions. Human ones." And his gesture of dismissal as he lit a cigarette was a warning not to question further.

I fell silent; I was aware of his eyes upon me, bringing a strange discomfort. When he said he must telephone home, and left the table, I was relieved, as if his absence made it easier to breathe. When he returned I said, "Well?" and he answered briefly, "I told them to send the car in to fetch me tomorrow." Calling the *patron*, he paid the bill, brushing my feeble attempts aside, and then seized my arm and pushed me through the singing youths into the street.

I murmured something about finding the car and going on my way, but he went on holding my arm and said, "I can't let you go like this. Our meeting is too unusual, too bizarre." We came once more to the entrance of his shabby, dim hotel, and I looked through the door and saw there was no one behind the desk. He noticed it too, and said quickly, "Come upstairs. Let's have one more drink before you go." His voice was urgent, insistent, as though we had little time to lose. I protested, but he half led me up the stairs. He took a key out of his pocket, opened a door, and switched on the light of a small drab single room. "Here," he said, "sit down on the bed." He brought out his flask and poured cognac into a tooth-glass. Once again the ceiling hit the floor

as it had done in the bistro, and it seemed to me that what was happening was fated, inevitable, that I should never be rid of him or he of me.

"What's the matter? Are you ill?" His eyes peered into mine.

I stood up, torn between two desires—one to get away, the other to stand beside him once again and look into the mirror. I knew that the first was wisdom and the other somehow evil, and yet it had to be done. We turned with one accord and stared, and the likeness seemed even more uncanny and horrible than it had been in the crowded buffet. He thrust the glass of cognac into my trembling hand and himself drank from the flask, and then he said, his voice unsteady as my own, "Shall I put on your clothes and you wear mine?"

I remember that one of us laughed as I hit the floor.

## CHAPTER 2

SOMEONE was knocking on the door. The sound went on and on until finally I roused myself from heaven knows what depths of darkness and shouted "*Entrez!*" A man came in, wearing a faded, old-fashioned chauffeur's uniform, and holding his cap in his hands. His build was short and square, his eyes deep brown, and he looked at me from the doorway with compassion. "Monsieur le Comte is awake at last?" he said.

I considered him a moment, frowning, and then I glanced about the room and saw one valise open on the chair, another on the floor, and the clothes of my late companion thrown over the end of the bed on which I lay. I was wearing a striped pyjama coat I did not recognize, and there was no sign of my own clothes.

"Who are you?" I said to the chauffeur. "What do you want?"

He sighed, flashed a sympathetic eye at the disorder of the room, and said, "Monsieur le Comte would like to sleep a little longer?"

"Monsieur le Comte isn't here," I said. "He must have gone out. What's the time?"

I remembered now that my companion had telephoned for a car to come and fetch him the next day. This must be Gaston, the chauffeur, who was mistaking me for his master.

"It is five o'clock in the evening," he said. "Monsieur le Comte has

slept very soundly all the day. I have been waiting here since eleven o'clock this morning."

His words held no reproach: they were merely a statement of fact. I put my hand to my aching head. I thought of the drinks the night before, and that last tooth-glass of cognac. "I fell," I told the chauffeur, "and I think I must have been drugged as well."

"Very possibly," he said. "These things will happen."

His voice had the soothing quality of an old nurse speaking to a child. I swung my legs out of bed and gazed down at the unfamiliar pyjama trousers. They fitted, yet they were not mine. At the end of the bed, I recognized the dark travelling suit of my companion.

"What happened to my clothes?" I asked.

The chauffeur came forward, and, taking the suit, hung the coat on the back of the chair and smoothed the trousers.

"Monsieur le Comte was no doubt thinking of other things when he undressed," he observed, and he glanced across at me and smiled.

"No," I said, "those things aren't mine. They belong to your master. Mine are probably in the wardrobe there."

He raised his eyebrows and pursed his lips, like someone who humours a child, and, crossing to the wardrobe, flung it open. There was nothing hanging there. I got out of bed and rummaged in the valises. They were filled with the possessions of my late companion: toilet articles, clothes, cheque-book, cards with "Comte de Gué, St. Gilles, Sarthe" on them. I realized then that we must have exchanged clothes in a fit of drunken folly, and somehow the thought of it was distasteful, beastly.

I went to the window and looked down into the street. There was a Renault drawn up in front of the hotel, and my car had gone.

"Did you see my car when you arrived?" I asked the chauffeur.

The man looked puzzled. "Monsieur le Comte has bought a new car?" he asked. "There was no other car when I came this morning."

His continued self-deception irritated me. "No," I said impatiently, "my car, my Ford. I am not Monsieur le Comte. Monsieur le Comte has gone out wearing my clothes. See if he left a message with anyone below. He must have taken my car too. It's a joke on his part, but I am not particularly amused."

A new expression—worried, upset—came into the chauffeur's eyes.

"There is no hurry," he said, "if Monsieur le Comte wishes to rest a little longer." Very gently, he put out his hand and felt my head. "Would you like me to fetch something from the *pharmacie*?" he asked.

I knew I must be patient. "Would you ask whoever is at the reception desk to come upstairs?" I said.

He left me and went down the stairs, and when he had gone I sat down again on the bed, my head in my hands. There was nothing I could do but wait. Presently de Gué would come back. He must come back. He had taken my car, my money, my passport, every personal thing I carried. I had only to go to the police; they would find him. Meanwhile . . . meanwhile, what?

The chauffeur came back into the room, and with him a greasy, furtive-looking man whom I took to be the reception clerk.

"Where is the gentleman I was with last night?" I asked. "Did anybody see him go out this morning?"

"You were alone when you took the room yesterday evening, Monsieur," replied the man. "Whether you were alone when you returned later in the evening I couldn't say. We are discreet here."

Beneath the obsequious tone I caught the note of familiarity, of contempt. The chauffeur was staring at the floor. I saw the clerk glance at my tumbled bed, and at the brandy-flask on the washstand.

"I must get on to the police," I said.

The man looked startled. "You have been robbed, Monsieur?"

The chauffeur raised his eyes and, still clutching his cap in his hand, came and stood beside me, as though to protect me. "It would be better not to have any trouble in a place like this, Monsieur le Comte," he said in a low voice. "In an hour or two you will be feeling more like yourself. Let me help you to dress, and then we will drive home as quickly as possible."

Suddenly I became angry. All right. If my late companion wished to make an idiot of me, I would do the same to him. I would put on his clothes, and drive his car to hell—as he was no doubt driving mine—and have myself arrested, and then wait for him to turn up to explain his senseless action as best he could.

"Very well. Clear out and leave me," I said to the chauffeur. He went, and the hotel-keeper with him, and with a strange distaste

and fury mingled. I reached for the clothes and began to dress.

When I had finished, my reflection stared back at me from the mirror with a strange indefinable difference. My own self had become submerged. It *was* the man who called himself Jean de Gué who stood there now. The change of clothes had brought a change of personality: my shoulders looked broader, I seemed to hold my head higher, even the expression in my eyes now resembled his. Slowly I took his wallet and searched it carefully in case he had left an explanation, some scrawl admitting the joke he had played upon me. There was nothing, no word, no clue.

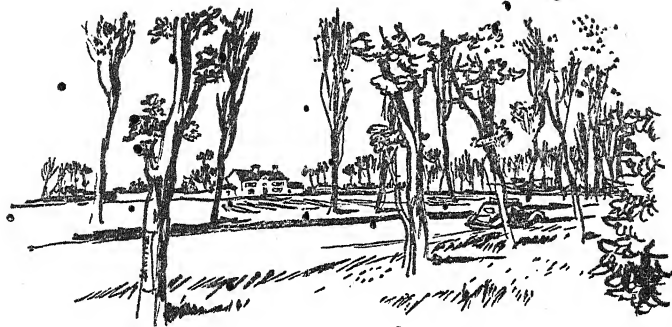
My anger grew. I foresaw the string of explanations that was going to be forced upon me—the rambling, disjointed story to the police, their bored reluctance to seek confirmation of my story that two of us, identical in appearance, had been together there.

I went downstairs, paid the bill, and had the luggage brought out to the ancient Renault and the waiting chauffeur. I realized that I had taken the first step in duplicity: by not at once demanding the police, by wearing the wrong clothes and passing myself off as Jean de Gué even for half an hour, I had put myself in the wrong. I was now the accomplice of the man who had driven away.

The chauffeur had put the luggage in the car. He held the door open. "Monsieur le Comte is himself again?" he asked anxiously.

I could have answered, "I am not Monsieur le Comte. Drive me to the police station at once," but I did not. I took my second decisive step, and got into the driving seat of the Renault, the chauffeur getting in beside me. I started the car, filled with an intense desire to get away from that dingy, shabby hotel, and, as my anger rose and self-disgust took possession of me, I followed the first road I saw that led out of Le Mans. I stepped on the accelerator, possessed by a reckless feeling I had never known before. The old car leapt in response. Whatever damage I do to her, I thought, it does not matter: the accident would be Jean de Gué's, not mine.

Suddenly I laughed, and the chauffeur beside me said, "That's better. Before we left Le Mans I was afraid that Monsieur le Comte was going to be ill. It was a good thing Monsieur Paul did not come instead of me, but luckily he had too much to do."



I must have driven about twenty-five kilometres along the *route nationale* when an approaching village forced me to slow down. We were through and out again the other side before the chauffeur said, "You have missed the turning, Monsieur le Comte."

I knew then that I was committed. Some freak of fortune had brought me to this spot on the map, to the heart of this unknown land to which I did not belong and which I had for years told myself I wanted to understand. For the first time I saw the point of the joke, the irony of the situation as it must have struck Jean de Gué when he left me sleeping in Le Mans.

"The only motive force in human nature is greed," he had said to me. "The thing to do is to minister to the greed, to give people what they want." He had given me what I asked, the chance to be accepted. He had lent me his name, his possessions, his identity. I had told him my own life was empty: he had given me his.

"All right," I said to the chauffeur, stopping the car. "You drive the rest of the way."

He looked at me inquiringly but made no answer, and we exchanged places without a word. He turned the car back to the village and struck left, leaving the *route nationale* behind us.

The setting sun dipped in our wake, and as we drove east the deep country folded upon us, forested and still. The lonely farmsteads lay oasis-like and misty amidst the soft red glow of fields. Everything had the quality of a dream. Long avenues of poplars, with shivering, falling leaves, came out of nowhere and disappeared again. A sudden impulse

bade me tell the chauffeur to stop the car, and I stood in the road for a moment, listening to silence, as the sun went down behind us dark and red, and the white mist rose.

Gaston said, "Monsieur le Comte has no great longing to go home?"

I looked down at his kind, honest face, sympathy in the depths of his brown eyes, and irony too, the gentle mockery of one who must surely love his master well, yet would dare to tell him when he strayed. His warmth brought a smile from me in answer, until I remembered that it was not me he loved but Jean de Gué. I climbed back again into the car beside him.

"It isn't always easy," I said, "to be a family man," echoing the words that had been spoken to me the night before.

"Very true," replied the chauffeur with a shrug and a sigh. "There are always so many problems in a household such as yours. Sometimes I wonder how Monsieur le Comte avoids disaster."

A household such as mine. . . . The road topped the brow of a hill and I saw a sign: *St. Gilles*. We passed an ancient church, a little sandy square flanked with a few worn houses and a solitary grocer's shop, and swung left down an avenue of limes and over a narrow bridge. And now the enormity of what I was doing hit me like a blow. I had but one desire—to run, to hide, not to be carried forward fatefully and inevitably to the ivy-covered château I saw looming ahead of me. The car jolted over a wooden bridge spanning a moat that was now gone to grass and nettles, and, passing swiftly through the open gate, came to a standstill beneath the château terrace. As I hesitated in the car, a man came out of the dark door between the windows and stood there on the terrace, waiting.

"There's Monsieur Paul," said Gaston. "If he questions me later I shall say you had business in Le Mans, and that I picked you up from the Hôtel de Paris."

He got out of the car and I followed slowly.

The man on the terrace looked down at me. "Well?" he said. "You've taken your time." And he did not smile.

I went up the steps, lifting my eyes to meet the first penetrating gaze, the man's use of the familiar "*tu*," proving him, surely, a relative. I saw that he was shorter, thinner, probably younger than myself, yet with a

haggard appearance as if he were tired or his health bad. The lines round his mouth were pinched and dissatisfied. I stood beside him, waiting for his move.

"You might have telephoned this morning," he said. "They waited lunch. Françoise and Renée declared you had had an accident. I said you were probably spending the day in the bar of the Hôtel de Paris. We tried to get you there, but they told us you hadn't been seen. After that, of course, there were the usual lamentations."

Surprise that I had passed his near inspection kept me silent. He looked me up and down, then laughed, the laugh of someone who is irritated, not amused. "I tell you frankly, you look a wreck."

For the first time in my life, I recognized dislike. The effect was strange. I was angry for the sake of Jean de Gué. Whatever he might have done to incur hostility, I was on his side.

"Thank you," I said. "Your opinion doesn't worry me. As a matter of fact, I feel extremely well."

He turned on his heel, walking towards the door, and Gaston caught my eye and smiled. I realized with amazement that I had said what was expected of me, and the answering "*tu*," which I had never used before, had come naturally, without effort.

I followed the man named Paul into the house. A narrow hall led to another, wider passage whence I could see a twisting stairway going to the floors above. At the far end of the wider passage there were two doors, half open. A murmur of voices came from one of them.

Paul crossed the passage and called, "Here is Jean arrived at last," his voice betraying his exasperation. He turned back to me. "I'm off. I'm late already. I can see you are in no fit state to tell me anything tonight. We can discuss things in the morning." He turned and went out.

Gaston, the two valises in his hand, was mounting the stairs. I wondered if I should follow him, when a woman's voice, high, complaining, called from the room beyond, "Are you there, Jean?" and once again the chauffeur glanced down at me in sympathy. Slowly, with lagging steps, I passed through the open door into the room. I had one swift impression of vastness, heavy curtains, papered walls. Standard lamps, masked by ugly shades with beaded fringes, dimmed the light. An



exquisite chandelier, glittering through a veil of dust, swung unlit from the high ceiling.

Three women were sitting in the room. As I entered they looked up, and one of them, tall as myself, with hard, clear-cut features and a narrow mouth, her hair strained back and twisted in a bun, immediately rose and left the room. A second, with dark hair and eyes, handsome, almost beautiful, yet, marred by a sallow skin and a sullen mouth, watched me without expression, from her chair. She called over her shoulder as the first woman left the room, "If you must go, Blanche, please shut the door. I mind draughts, if nobody else does."

The third woman had faded, rather colourless blonde hair. She might have been pretty once, with her small delicate features and blue eyes, but her expression of defeat, of petulance, destroyed the first impression of charm. She gave a little laugh of exasperation, and then, rising, came towards me across the polished floor. "Well," she said, "aren't you going to kiss either of us?"

I bent my head and kissed her on both cheeks, crossed the floor and kissed the other woman in the same fashion. The fair, blue-eyed one took my arm, leading me to the open hearth on which one log smouldered. "You may well look ashamed of yourself. We have been worried sick that you might have had an accident, but as usual you didn't give that a thought. I begin to think you do this sort of thing on purpose, just to frighten us and make us imagine the worst."

"And what would that be, the worst?" I asked her.

My retort, coming so quickly, gave me confidence. I felt that it did not matter what I said or did: however outrageous, these people would have to accept it.

"You know perfectly well we must have been anxious," the woman said, dropping my arm. "When you are away from home you are capable of anything. You talk too much, you drink too much, you drive too fast . . . ."

"I do everything, in fact, to excess?" I interrupted.

"You do everything you can to make us miserable," she said.

"Oh, leave him alone," called the other woman. "It is obvious he isn't going to tell you anything. You are just wasting your time."

"Thank you," I said.



She flashed me a look of understanding. We were allies, perhaps? I wondered who she was. The fair woman sat down again and sighed. I realized now, from her figure, that she must be expecting a child.

"You could at least tell us what happened in Paris," she said.

"I have no idea what happened in Paris," I said carelessly. "I'm suffering from loss of memory."

"You are suffering from too much drink," she answered. "I can smell it on your breath. It would be a good idea if you went up to bed and slept it off. Don't go near Marie-Noel—she has some fever, and it might be catching. They have a case of German measles in the village, and if I were to get that, in my condition—" She paused significantly.

I wondered how I could escape and find the right room. I should recognize the valises, of course, unless they had been unpacked, and bed was at least a place to think and plan. Or did I no longer want to think or plan? Laughter rose in my throat.

"What is it now?" asked the fair woman, resentfully.

"It's an extraordinary situation," I said. "You neither of you know how extraordinary."

The freedom of saying this acted like a charm on my own lingering consciousness of self. It was like being invisible, or possessing a ventriloquist's voice.

"I see nothing funny in infection," said the fair woman. "Or do you mean the situation in Paris was extraordinary? I hope, for everyone's sake, that you came to some agreement."

I turned from her reproachful eyes to those of the other woman, but her expression had changed. She looked wary, and shook her head, imperceptibly, as if in warning. She and de Gué were undoubtedly allies, but what relation were the three of them, one to the other? I decided suddenly to tell the truth.

"Actually," I said, "I am not Jean de Gué at all. I am someone else. We met in Le Mans last night, and changed clothes, and he has disappeared in my car, heaven knows where, and I am here in his place. You must admit it's an extraordinary situation."

I expected an outburst but the fair woman simply yawned, and remarked to the dark one that Paul would probably come home late from his dinner. My remark, which they must have interpreted as some

tasteless joke, fell so flat that they did not even answer it. This surely proved that deception was complete. I could say anything, do anything: they would merely believe me to be drunk or mad. I could, if I chose, do incalculable harm to these people—injure them, upset their lives, put them at odds with one another. When Jean de Gué left me in Le Mans, did he realize the danger? Was his action not the wild prank it appeared, but a deliberate desire that I might wreck the home which he said possessed him?

The dark woman turned on me, her eyes brooding, suspicious. "Why don't you go upstairs as Françoise suggests?" she said.

"Very well, I will," I said. "You were both right. I drank too much in Le Mans. I spent the day there senseless in an hotel."

The fact that it was true added flavour to deception. Both women stared. Neither said anything. I crossed the floor and went out into the hall beyond. I heard the one called Françoise break into a torrent of words as soon as I left the room.

The hall was empty and I decided to try the stairs. The first flight ended in a long corridor, leading left and right; above me was a further flight to another floor. I hesitated, then turned left along the corridor. I was seized with a furtive excitement as I turned the handle of the door at the far end. The room was dark. I felt for a switch. The light revealed a bleak high room, dark-red curtains drawn across the windows, a high single bed also draped with red, above which hung a large reproduction of Guido Reni's "Ecce Homo." The windows were circular, forming an alcove, and this had been adapted as a place for prayer, with a prie-dieu, a crucifix, even a stoup for holy water.

I switched off the light and went out. As I did so I saw that a woman had come down from the floor above, and now stood watching me. "*Bonsoir*, Monsieur le Comte," she said. "Are you looking for Mademoiselle Blanche?"

"Yes," I lied quickly, "she's not in her room."

I felt obliged to go towards her. She was small, thin and elderly. I judged her to be a servant. "Mademoiselle Blanche is with Madame la Comtesse," she said. The expression in her eyes was curious.

"It doesn't matter," I said. "I can see her later."

Her eyes flickered away from me. I sensed no warmth there, yet there

was at the same time a suggestion of long familiarity, some understanding between us of an unpleasant kind. I was about to pass her when she said, "Madame la Comtesse knows you are home. It would be best to come up and see her now or I shall have no peace."

Madame la Comtesse. . . . The words were ominous. If I were Monsieur le Comte, then who was she?

"Very well," I said. The servant turned towards the stairs and I went after her up the long, twisting flight to another corridor like the one below, and proceeded to a door at the end.

The servant opened it, giving me a little nod, like a signal, and as she went through she said to someone within, "I met Monsieur le Comte coming up the stairs. He was on his way to see you."

There were three persons in the room, which was large but so filled with furniture that there was hardly space to move. Dominating the whole was a great double bed with curtained hangings. A stove, burning brightly with open doors, gave out an intense heat. Two small fox terriers, bows and bells jangling from their collars, ran towards me barking shrilly. I swung my eyes round the room and saw the tall, thin woman who had left the salon when I entered it, and close to her an ancient curé, white-haired, his small black cap on the back of his head. Beyond him, seated in a great arm-chair, almost on top of the stove, was a massive elderly woman, her flesh sagging in a hundred lines, but her eyes, nose and mouth astonishingly, horribly like my own.

She held out her arms, and, drawn to her like a magnet, I went instinctively to kneel beside her chair, and was at once caught and smothered in a mountain of flesh and woollen wraps, feeling momentarily like a fly trapped in a great spider's web. Her hands clung about me, reluctant to let me go yet pushing me at the same time, murmuring in my ear, "There, there, be off with you, great baby, great brute. You've been amusing yourself, I know. Everyone is upset as usual with your goings on. Françoise in hysterics, Marie-Noël with a fever, Renée sulking, Paul ill-tempered. Ouf! They make me sick, the whole collection. I knew you would turn up when you were ready to come home, and not before." She patted me again on the shoulder and thrust me away.

I glanced at the thin woman, who had not once looked at me since I entered the room, but now closed the book she was holding.

"You don't wish me to go on reading any more, I suppose, Maman," she said, her voice dead, expressionless. I knew that she must be Mademoiselle Blanche in whose bedroom I had just trespassed, and guessed that she must therefore be an elder sister to my masquerading self. The countess turned to the curé.

"Since Jean has come home, Monsieur le Curé," she said in a tone of courtesy and respect, "would you think it very rude of me if I asked to be excused this evening from our usual little session? He will have so much to tell me."

"Naturally, Madame la Comtesse," said the curé, rising to his feet, his pink face wreathed in smiles; and after bows and farewells, he left the room, closely followed by Mademoiselle Blanche, head bent low like an acolyte.

The servant came towards us with a medicine glass and said, "Monsieur le Comte will have a tray up here as well?"

"Naturally, idiot," said the comtesse, "and I'm not going to take any of that stuff, Charlotte. Throw it away. Get out!" Impatiently she gestured to the door. "Come here," she said, beckoning me to sit beside her, while the two fox terriers leapt upon her lap and settled there. "Well now, did you do it, did you settle with Carvalet?"

It was the first direct question put to me since I had come to the château which I could not evade with some jest or careless remark. I swallowed. "Did I do what?" I asked.

"Renew the contract," she said.

Jean de Gué had gone to Paris, then, on business. I remembered envelopes and folders in the writing-case in the valise. The matter was evidently important, and the expression in her eyes brought back to me once again those words of Jean de Gué about human greed. "Minister to it . . . give people what they want. . . ." This being his creed, doubtless he would satisfy his mother now. "Don't worry," I told her, "everything is arranged."

"Ah!" She gave a little grunt of satisfaction. "You actually came to terms with them after all. And you brought me the little present you promised?" Her eyes went small, her body stiff with expectation. The atmosphere suddenly became taut and strange. I did not know how to answer her.

"Did I promise you a present?" I asked.

Her great mouth sagged. Her eyes pleaded with a tense, frightened look I would not have believed possible a moment ago.

"You didn't forget?" she said.

I was spared a reply by the reappearance of Blanche. A change of expression came like a mask over the mother's face. The daughter proceeded to tidy books and papers about the room, never looking in my direction. I guessed her age to be about forty-two or three, yet she could have been older or younger. The cross and chain which she wore over the dark jumper were her only adornments. She brought a table beside her mother's chair in preparation for dinner. Then she sat down and took up her knitting.

"Marie-Noel has been seeing visions again," said the mother to me.

Someone below had talked of Marie-Noel having a fever. Was she another religious sister? "It's probably due to her fever," I said.

"She hasn't a fever. She likes everyone to notice her, that's all. What did you say to her before you went to Paris that upset her?"

"I didn't say anything," I answered.

"You must have done. She kept telling Françoise and Renée that you were not coming back. It was not only you who told her, but the Sainte Vierge as well."

I glanced at Blanche. She raised her pale eyes from the clicking needles to her mother. "If Marie-Noel has visions," she said, "and I for one believe her, then it is time that somebody in this house took them seriously. If they continue, I shall write to the bishop. I am very sure what his advice will be: that Marie-Noel should live amongst people where she cannot possibly be corrupted, and where she can offer her gifts to the greater glory of God."

"You are a fool, Blanche," said the comtesse. "If we are to have a saint in the family, let us keep her at home. We might turn St. Gilles into a place of pilgrimage. Money might be found at last to repair the roof of the church."

"Marie-Noel's soul is of greater importance than the roof of the church," said Blanche. "If I had my way she would leave the château tomorrow."

"You're jealous," said her mother, "jealous of her pretty face and her

big eyes. One of these days Marie-Noel won't bother about visions any more—she'll want a husband. Isn't that so, Jean?"

"Probably," I said.

"Pray God I live to see the wedding. He'll have to be rich. . . ."

Charlotte came in with a tray, closely followed by a little red-cheeked *femme de chambre* of about eighteen, who at sight of me blushed and giggled and said, "*Bonsoir, Monsieur le Comte,*" as she arranged a tray for me on another table. Blanche put aside her knitting and kissed her mother good night. Then she left the room followed by the *femme de chambre*, whom Charlotte addressed as Germaine, without having once looked at me. I wondered what Jean de Gué had done to offend her. I uncovered my bowl of soup; it smelt good and I was hungry.

Curiosity made me venture a question to the mother. "What was the matter with Blanche?" I asked.

"Nothing particular. If anything, she's irritated me less than usual. Charlotte, are you there? Give Monsieur Jean his wine. Why don't you tell me more about Paris? You have told me nothing yet."

I searched my imagination. What I knew and loved of Paris was too full of museums and historical buildings for her ear. I talked of eating, which she understood, and the expense, which pleased her even better, and with sudden inspiration invented visits to the theatre, a meeting with wartime friends—she even supplied their names for me, which helped. By the time the trays were removed, I felt more at ease with her than I had ever done with anyone in my life. The reason was simple: she accepted me, loved me, trusted me; I held a position that had never been mine before. I laughed, I chatted, and the unaccustomed ease was a delight to me—until suddenly, when Charlotte had left the room, she said to me, "Jean, you didn't really forget my little present, did you? You were joking."

Once again the sagging mouth, the pleading eyes. Gone was the wicked humour, the rollicking impression of warmth, and savagery combined. She had changed into a pitiable, trembling creature, hands clawing at mine. I did not know what to do or what to say. I went to the door and called, "Charlotte, are you there?"

Charlotte came quickly from some room nearby, and I said, "Madame la Comtesse is unwell. You had better go to her."



She looked at me and asked, "Haven't you brought it? You know, Monsieur le Comte, what you promised to bring from Paris?"

I tried to think of the contents of the valise, and remembered some packages that looked like presents. What they were I did not know, nor where the things had been unpacked.

Charlotte said to me swiftly, "Go and find it at once, Monsieur le Comte. She will suffer if you don't."

I went down the first flight of stairs, and presently came to a room with the door open. I threw a quick glance round it, and to my relief I had struck lucky. It was a small dressing-room, with a single bed in it, and I recognized the brushes on the table. Someone had unpacked for me, and the valises had been removed, but there on the table were the packages. Thank God, here was one addressed to "Maman," wrapped in strong brown paper, sealed. I took it and went up the stairs again.

Charlotte was waiting for me. "Have you got it?" she said.

"Yes," I answered. "Does she want me to give it to her?"

She stared at me and answered "No, no . . ." as though shocked. Taking the package from me, she said, "Good night, Monsieur le Comte." Then she walked quickly away along the corridor.

I went slowly down again and stood in the dressing-room, suddenly tired and depressed. I could not forget the change in the mother's face. As I stood there, wondering what to do, I heard a voice calling to me, "Have you said good night to Maman?"

I recognized the voice of Françoise, the fair, faded woman, and for the first time I noticed a door which had been screened by a large wardrobe. She must have heard me come into the dressing-room.

I braced myself for the effort and went through the door. I was looking into a large bedroom, with lightly figured wallpaper and an alcove holding a dressing-table and a looking-glass. A large double bed faced the alcove. Françoise was sitting up in it, her hair pinned in curlers, a fluffy, pink bed-jacket round her shoulders.

She said to me, still plaintive, still aggrieved, "Of course you had to stay the whole evening upstairs with Maman. Don't you ever for one moment stop to consider me? Even Renée, who is generally on your side, said you are becoming quite impossible."

I glanced away from her weary, complaining face to the empty pillow on the other side. I recognized the striped pyjamas that I had worn at the hotel, folded neatly on the turned-down sheet. I had thought, in my stupidity, that Françoise was married to Paul, and was the sister of Jean de Gué. I realized, with a sinking heart, that she was his wife.

## CHAPTER 3

MY FIRST instinct, absurd and automatic, was to retrieve the pyjamas, and I went and fetched them, not glancing at Françoise, and turned back again into the dressing-room. To my dismay she started to cry, saying something about not caring for her, and being miserable, and how Maman had always come between us. I waited for the sounds to cease. Presently there was a blowing of the nose, and those little sniffs and coughs that accompany the aftermath of crying and the attempt at self-control. I wondered if Jean de Gué had foreseen this moment, or whether he had thought, as I had driving to the château, that after an hour or two the game would be played out, the masquerade be over.

If he really intended to slip away and make me his scapegoat, then it clearly proved that he cared for no one at the château: I could do with them as I pleased. The elation and ease I had experienced with the mother had changed to depression with her change of mood, and I had wanted to placate her. Now, with the realization that the complaining Françoise was de Gué's wife, I wanted to placate her too: her tears distressed me.

I went to the table and picked up the package marked F. It had a fancy wrapping and was small and hard. I stood a moment, weighing it in my hand, then once again I opened the bedroom door. The room was in darkness. "Are you awake?" I said.

I heard a movement; then the light was switched on and she sat up, looking at me. Her curlers were now concealed by a net cap, and the fluffy bed jacket had been exchanged for a shawl. The effect was incongruous against the pale tired face. "What is it?" she said.

I went over to her. "Listen," I said, "you must forgive me if I was abrupt just now. Maman seemed suddenly unwell, and I was worried. Look, I bought you this in Paris."

I put the package into her hand, but she let it drop on the coverlet, and sighed. "Sometimes I think Maman hates me, and not only Maman but all of you. Even Marie-Noel has no feeling for me." She did not seem to expect an answer, and I was thankful, for I had no words. "When we were first married, it was different," she went on. "I felt so happy. Then little by little it all seemed to slip away, the happy feeling. I don't know if it's my fault or yours." The wan face under the ugly net cap stared up at me without hope. "I wouldn't care if I had you to myself, but here everyone is on top of us. Everything's closing in on me, the château, the family, the whole countryside. It's like being suffocated. The terrible thing is that you don't notice, you don't mind."

She fingered the package, which she had not opened, and I thought that the evening with the mother had been too easy. I did not know what to say to her. Suddenly she said quite simply, without complaint or grievance, "Jean, I'm frightened. You know what Dr. Lebrun said when I lost the last. It isn't easy for me."

I felt inadequate and useless. I took the package from her, undid it, and drew out a small velvet case, which I opened. Inside was a locket, framed in pearls, which, when the release was sprung, revealed a miniature of myself, or rather him. The workmanship was very fine, and it must have cost the purchaser no mean sum of money.

She uttered an exclamation of wonder and delight. "Oh, how beautiful!" she said. "And how dear of you to think of it! I have been grumbling, complaining . . . and you bring me this. Forgive me." She put her hand up to my face. I forced a smile. "You are good to put up with me," she said. "When I talk to you I hear words coming out of my mouth that I don't really mean, and I hate myself for it, but I can't prevent it."

She closed the locket, then opened it again, two or three times, smiling at the trick of it. Then she pinned it on her shawl. "Look," she said, "I wear my husband on my heart. Did you have this specially done for me in Paris?"

"Yes," I said.

"Paul will never get over it when he sees it," she said. "But I suppose it means that the visit was successful after all. How exactly like you to celebrate by doing something extravagant. You know, I feel so helpless

when I hear Paul talking about the impossibility of carrying on at the foundry, and I feel he is hinting at my own money all tied up in that ridiculous way. However, if we have a boy . . .” She lay back, still touching the locket pinned on her shawl. “I shall sleep now,” she said. “Don’t be long. You must be tired.”

She switched off her light, and I heard her sigh and settle once more against the pillow.

I went back to the dressing-room, threw open the window, and leant out. It was a moonlit night, cold and clear. Beneath me was the tangled grass of the moat, and its rough stone ivy-covered walls, and beyond stretched what might once have been a formal garden but was now given to grass too, where the cattle wandered, this in turn forming rides and avenues that became lost in the dusky trees. The deep silence was broken now and then by a single plopping sound, like the drip of water. I leant out and craned my head to try and trace it, but could not, for no water came from the grinning gargoyle face that stared down at me from the coping of the tower above.

The church clock in the village struck eleven, and when the last note had died away the feeling of oppression and distress increased within me, and the voice of reason seemed to say, “What are you doing in this place? Get out, before it’s too late.”

I opened the door to the corridor and listened. Everything was quiet. I went out and down the stairs. I had turned the handle of the door to the terrace when I was aware of a footstep on the stair behind me, and, looking up, I saw the dark woman, Renée, in wrapper and slippers, her hair loose on her shoulders.

“Where are you going?” she whispered.

“Outside, for some air,” I lied swiftly. “I couldn’t sleep.”

“I heard you come down from Maman, and then I waited for you, leaving my door open. Didn’t you notice it?”

“No,” I said.

She looked incredulous. “You must have realized I urged Paul to go out to the dinner on purpose, as soon as I knew you would be home. Now the evening is wasted. He’ll be back any moment.”

“I’m sorry,” I said. “Maman had a lot to say to me—it was impossible to get away. Surely we can talk tomorrow?”

"Tomorrow?" she echoed, her manner abrupt and queer. "Tomorrow is soon enough for you, is it, after ten days in Paris? I might have known it. I suppose that's why you didn't bother to answer my letters."

Her anger irritated me. The mother's mood had touched me, and the wife's too; I had no time for this one. "You'll catch cold," I said to her. "Why don't you go to bed?"

She stared at me; then, catching her breath, she said, "*Mon Dieu*; how I hate you at times!" Turning her back, she went upstairs.

I opened the door and stepped outside. The air felt clean and good. I walked softly down the steps towards the moat. Once again the little plopping thud that had disturbed me in the dressing-room sounded, close by, and I saw that it was the chestnuts falling from the trees on to the gravel path beyond the moat.

The church clock struck the half-hour. I had lingered long enough amongst these people who were strangers to me. I decided to cross the bridge, take the road away from the village, and walk through the night to the nearest town.

The chestnuts continued to fall beside the moat, and this time, with no trees near, one hit me on the head and dropped beside me. I looked up, puzzled, and saw that a small window in a turret above the dressing-room held a peering figure, kneeling on the sill. Suddenly the figure rose to its feet and stood on the sill by the open slit, and I saw that it was a child, perhaps ten years old, wearing a white night-gown, and that one false move would send it headlong to the depths below. I could not distinguish sex or feature: all I could sense was danger.

"Go back," I called softly. The figure did not move. "Go back," I called again. "Go back, or you will fall."

Then the child spoke, the voice clear and high and quite composed. "I swear to you," it said, "that if you don't come to me by the time I count a hundred, I shall throw myself out of the window."

I did nothing, and the voice called again: "You know I never break my word. I'm beginning to count now. One . . . two . . . three . . ."

The conversation of the evening made sense to me at last. It had never occurred to me that the religious, saintly Marie-Noel might be a child. The voice continued counting, and I turned and went back into the house. I groped my way up the stairs to the first corridor, blindly

seeking a stairway that might lead me to the turret-room. When I came to a winding stair, lit by a dim blue bulb, I ran up it, two steps at a time. At the top there was a door; from behind it I could hear the voice counting steadily, "Eighty-six, eighty-seven . . ." I burst through the door, seized the figure from the window-sill, and threw it down on its bed beside the wall. It stared up at me; and as I looked at the enormous eyes and close-cropped hair, I felt sick because here was a replica of Jean de Gué, and therefore in fantastic fashion of a self long buried in the past and so forgotten.

"Why did you not come to say good night, Papa?" she said to me.

She gave me no time to think what I should answer. She jumped up, flinging her arms round my neck, covering me with kisses.

"Well?" she said—the inevitable "*Alors?*" that is question and exclamation and retort all in one—and I repeated it, to gain time, to try and grasp the significance of this new and unexpected complication of a daughter, and then, endeavouring to hold my ground, I said, "I thought you were supposed to have a fever?"

"I did this morning," she said. "Since I stood up by the window it has probably shot up. But sit down." I sat down and glanced round the room—an odd mixture of nursery and cell. Against one wall was a prie-dieu, made out of a packing case with a piece of old brocade on top. Above this was a crucifix; between two candles on the prie-dieu, a statue of the Madonna. On the wall were pictures of the



Holy Family and St. Thérèse of Lisieux, and incongruously, perched lopsided on a stool, a stuffed doll pierced through the heart with a penholder, and labelled "The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian." Toys more suited to her age lay about the floor; beside her bed was a youthful photograph of Jean de Gué in uniform.

"Why didn't you come to see me the instant you got back?" she said imperiously. I did not answer. "Joker," she said lightly. Then she seized my hand and kissed it. "Have you had your nails manicured?" she asked.

"No."

"They are a different shape, and your hands are cleaner. I suppose that is what Paris does for men. Also you have a different smell, like a doctor, or a priest, or a stranger who comes to tea."

"I'm sorry." I stared at her, nonplussed.

"It will pass off. What have you been doing?"

I decided to speak all the truth possible. "I slept in an hotel in Le Mans. I had drunk too much. Also I swallowed a sleeping draught by mistake."

"The Sainte Vierge told me you mightn't ever come back. That's why I got a fever. It is a sign of grace. If you hadn't taken that sleeping draught, would you have gone away?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"You told me before you went to Paris that if life became too difficult you would just disappear one day and never come home again."

"I'd forgotten I said that."

"I hadn't forgotten. When Uncle Paul began talking about the money troubles, and how you had gone to Paris to try and arrange things, I thought to myself, Now is the moment for him to do this. I woke in the night and was sick, and the Sainte Vierge came and stood at the end of my bed and looked sorrowful."

The direct gaze of the child was hard to meet.

"If I hadn't come back," I asked, "what would you have done?"

"Killed myself," she said.

"Children don't kill themselves," I told her.

"Then why did you run upstairs so fast just now?"

"You might have slipped."

"I couldn't have slipped. I was holding on. But if you hadn't come home I shouldn't have held on. I should have jumped out, and died. And then I should have burnt in hell. But I would rather burn in hell than live in this world without you."

I looked at her again: the small, oval face, the close-cropped hair, the burning eyes. The passionate avowal was disturbing, and I thought hard to find the right thing to say. "Marie-Noël," I said, "promise something. Promise you won't climb on the window-sill again."

"I will promise, if you will too," she said.

I sensed a trap. This was something for Jean de Gué to handle, not for me. I did not understand children. "What must I promise?" I asked.

"Never to go away. Or, if you must go, to take me with you."

Once again I avoided the direct question in her eyes. The situation was impossible. "Listen," I said, "I promise you that, if I do go away, I'll tell you first. I may tell nobody else, but I will tell you."

"That's fair," she nodded. "Tell me," she went on, "is it true that measles can be bad for unborn babies?"

The switch of mood was beyond me. "I don't know," I said.

"Maman told me that if my fever was measles, and I passed it to her, then the little brother would be born blind. If he was blind, would you like him? Or would he have to be put in an institution?"

"No, he would be taken care of at home. Anyway, it won't happen. Now go to sleep." I tucked her into bed. "Good night," I said, "sleep well." And I kissed her on the cheek.

I went out and down to the dressing-room.

I felt suddenly very tired. The house was quite still. I crept into the bedroom, listening, and from the sound of breathing knew Françoise to be asleep. I went back into the dressing-room and put on the pyjamas I had worn at the hotel. Then I picked up the parcel that bore the initials M-N. Carefully I undid the wrapping. It was a book about St. Thérèse of Lisieux. *The Little*





*Flower*. On the fly-leaf Jean de Gué had written, "To my adorable Marie-Noel, with all my heart, Papa."

I wrapped it up again, and put it back on the table. He must have chosen his presents with great care. Whatever he had brought his mother was something she needed badly. The locket had dried his wife's tears. *The Little Flower* would feed the imagination of his child, so that she might see visions, and dream dreams, and in doing so perhaps nag his conscience less—that is, if he had a conscience, which I doubted.

Jean de Gué had run away from life, from the emotions that he had himself created. None of these people would be behaving as they had tonight but for something he had done to them. The mother would not have turned to me with frightened eyes, the sister would not have left the room in silence, Paul would not have spoken with hostility, Renée would not have cursed me on the stairs, the wife would not have wept, the child would not have threatened to throw herself out of the window. Jean de Gué had failed. And that was why he had left me sleeping in the hotel in Le Mans and gone away. I knew now that he would not come back. He would not even bother to find out what had happened. I could do as I pleased.

I said aloud, "Oh, God, what am I to do? Ought I to leave this place, or should I stay?"

And there was no answer, only a question mark.

## CHAPTER 4

I AWOKE next morning in a different vein. Last night I had sensed tragedy, and was so filled with compassion that it had seemed to me I was destined to make amends to these people for all that had gone wrong in their lives and my own. The self who wakened this morning suggested that they might be as much to blame as Jean de Gué; that the whole situation was but a prolongation of my holiday, and when it got out of control, as sooner or later it must, I could leave. The one embarrassment—discovery—would have happened last night if it was going to happen at all. Whatever blunders I might make in the future would be put down to whim or freak of temper, for the simple reason that I was above suspicion.

Someone knocked. I called out "*Entrez!*" and the blushing, rosy-cheeked *femme de chambre* who had served my dinner presented herself at the door. "Monsieur le Comte slept well?" she asked.

I told her very well, and asked for coffee. I inquired after the rest of the family and was informed that Madame la Comtesse was *souffrante* and staying in bed; that Mademoiselle was in church; that Monsieur Paul had gone to the *verrerie*; that Marie-Noel was getting up; that Madame Jean and Madame Paul were in the salon. I thanked her and she went away. I had learned three things: my present to the mother had done her no good; Paul's business, the family business, was a glass foundry; and Renée, the dark woman, was his wife.

Gaston, the chauffeur, wearing now the striped coat of a *valet de chambre*, brought my coffee to the dressing-room. I greeted him as a friend.

"Things are better this morning, then?" he said, placing the tray on the table. "It is not so bad to be home again after all." He went to the wardrobe, took out a brown tweed jacket and began to brush it. "Will Monsieur le Comte be going down to the *verrerie*?"

"Not this morning," I said. "Did Monsieur Paul suggest it?"

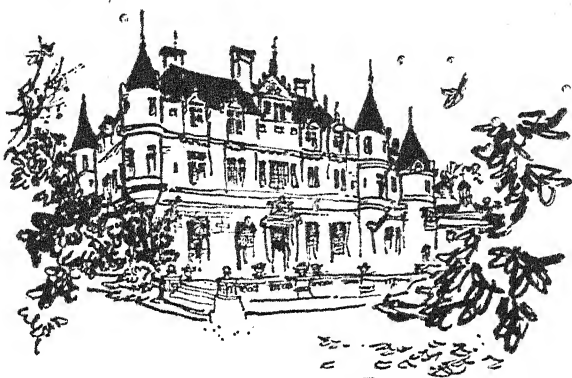
"Monsieur Paul will be back for lunch as usual. Possibly he is expecting you to go with him this afternoon."

"What's the time now?"

"Already after half past ten, Monsieur le Comte."

When I had dressed, I walked downstairs and, hearing the murmur of women's voices from the salon, crept softly to the open door leading to the terrace and so out into the golden autumn day. The château, graceful and serene, might have been an island, separated as it was by moat and wall from the village of St. Gilles; an island whose way of life went back to centuries long past, having no concern with the postman I saw wheeling his bicycle past the village church or the van bringing supplies to the *épicerie*.

I found a door in the wall, and a narrow footbridge leading across the moat; and, turning left, avoiding the garage and stabling, I was at once amongst cow-houses and straw and muddy earth, with a vegetable garden beyond, and beyond this fields surrounded by forest. The paths through the forest spread out from a single centre, like the hours on a



sundial; and a dell in the centre was dominated by a lichen-covered statue of Artemis, the classic drapery chipped, the right hand of the huntress missing.

I walked up one of the paths and looked at the chateau from the farthest point, seeing it now as a picture within a frame. The blue-black roof, the turrets, the tall chimneys and the sandstone walls had shrunk to fairy-tale proportions: it no longer held living, feeling people, but was a plate turned over in a book of illustrations, noted momentarily for its beauty and then dismissed.

I retraced my steps past the seeking Artemis, and as I neared the chateau the long windows of the salon opened and the child came running out, calling, "Papa . . . Papa . . ." Crossing the footbridge, she sprang over the grass to join me, leaping high when almost on top of me so that I had to catch her in mid-air like a ballet dancer.

I put her down and we walked off aimlessly together, hand in hand, she stooping to pick up chestnuts when we came to the path, filling a pocket in her frock and then throwing the rest away. Presently she ran on ahead, skipping and leaping, and I followed her to the stabling and outbuildings. A dog, which had been sleeping in the sun, stretched himself, wagging his tail, and she opened the gate of his run and let him out. He barked as he saw me approach, and when I called out, "Come here, then, what's the matter, old fellow?" he kept his distance and growled, standing beside Marie-Noël as though to guard her.

"Stop it, César," said the child, jerking at his collar. "Have you gone

blind that you don't know your master? Perhaps he isn't feeling well." He wagged his tail again and licked her hand, but he did not come to me, and stood where I was, with an intuition that my efforts to make friends would only increase his suspicion.

"Leave him alone. Don't excite him," I said, and I began to walk towards the house, while the child patted the dog's great flanks and felt his nose.

As I reached the château, I saw Blanche turn down the hill from the church, all in black, with a little old-fashioned toque on her head. Looking neither to right nor to left, she walked stiff and straight up the gravel drive to the terrace steps. Even when Marie-Noel ran to meet her, her frozen face never relaxed an instant. "As you are now well enough to be out of doors, Marie-Noel," she said, "you are well enough to come for your lessons with me after lunch."

"I don't have to do them today, do I, Papa?" the child protested.

"I don't see why not," I said, believing I might ingratiate myself with Blanche.

Blanche made no comment. She walked straight past me into the house: I might not have been there. Marie-Noel took my hand and shook it crossly. "Why are you in such a bad humour today?" she said.

"I'm not in a bad humour."

"You are. You don't want to play with me."

"It won't hurt you to have lessons, if your aunt can spare the time," I said. "Now come upstairs—I have something for you."

It occurred to me suddenly that the giving of Jean's presents would be much simpler if it were done at the table, while we were all assembled there having lunch, than if I gave them to each one individually. But the child might have hers now, as a sop, because I had taken an unpopular attitude over the lessons.

She followed me up to the dressing-room, and I went to the table and gave her the book in its wrappings. She tore them off, and when she saw what the book was she exclaimed in delight and hugged it to her. "It is just what I wanted," she said. "Oh, my darling, sweet Papa, why do you always guess the right things?"

In her enthusiasm she flung herself upon me, and once again I was forced to undergo the arms round the neck, the cheek thrust against

mine, the random kisses falling anywhere. This time instead of being awkward with her I found myself responding. I pulled her hair and tickled the back of her neck, both of us laughing, her very naturalness making me unafraid, confident of myself and of her.

"Must I do lessons?" she said, sensing intuitively my sudden response, trying to turn it to advantage.

"I don't know," I said. "We can decide that later." Putting her down, I stood looking at the other packages. "I'll tell you something," I said. "I've brought presents from Paris for everyone. I gave your mother hers last night, and one to your grandmother too. We'll put these in the dining-room, and they can open them at lunch."

"Uncle Paul and Aunt Renée? It's not either of their birthdays."

"No, but it's a good thing to give presents. It shows appreciation. I have one for your Aunt Blanche too."

"For my Aunt Blanche?" She stared at me, amazed. "But you never give her anything, even for Christmas or the New Year!"

"Well, I'm giving her something now. It might make her better tempered."

The child went on staring at me, and began biting her fingers. "I don't think it's a good idea, opening the presents at the table, in front of everyone," she said, her voice worried. "What have you brought for the others?"

"We'll see later."

I heard the sound of a car driving up to the château, and Marie-Noël ran to the window and craned out. "It's my Uncle Paul," she said. "His present is the smallest of the lot. I shouldn't like to be him. But, being a man, I suppose he can hide his feelings."

We went down like conspirators and into the dining-room—a long, narrow room facing the terrace—and cunningly I told the child to lay the presents in their proper places, which she did with evident enjoyment. I noticed, to my surprise, that Blanche, the sister, sat at one end of the table, not Françoise, as I should have thought. Gaston came into the room, changed from his valet's rig to a dark coat.

"What do you think, Gaston," said Marie-Noël, "Papa is giving everybody presents, even my Aunt Blanche. It is not in celebration of anything, it is just a sign of appreciation."

I saw Gaston dart me a quick look, and I wondered why it should be so unusual to present gifts on returning home. A moment or two later he flung open double doors at the end of the room, leading to what appeared to be a library, and said, "Madame la Comtesse is served." The rather stiff little group which his action revealed looked up as the child and I advanced into the room.

"Papa has a surprise for you all," Marie-Noel said, "but I am not going to tell you what it is."

I saw apprehension on both Françoise's face and Renée's. "What is it, Jean?" said Françoise, rising to her feet.

"Nothing," I replied. "Marie-Noel likes to be mysterious. It's only that I have brought back a small present for everyone, and we put them on the table in the dining-room."

The tension eased. Renée relaxed, Paul shrugged his shoulders, and Françoise smiled, fingering the locket which she wore pinned on to her jumper. Blanche betrayed no interest whatsoever.

"I'm afraid you spent too much money in Paris," said Françoise. "If you continue giving me presents like this one there'll be nothing left at all." She passed by into the dining-room and we followed her. I made a pretence of tying my shoe, allowing the others to sit, so as to make sure that I was right in assuming my place to be at the head of the table. This was correct, and I sat down. There was a momentary hush while Blanche said grace and we bowed our heads over our plates. I noticed Marie-Noel watch her aunt in fascination, and, looking to the end of the table, I saw that Blanche's eyes were on the package beside her napkin. Her usual frozen immobility changed to incredulity. Had the package been a live snake she could not have expressed greater horror or disgust. Then she regained composure, and, ignoring the package, she placed the napkin on her lap.

I saw then that the others were all looking at me with curiosity. "Well," I said, "what's wrong? Why are you all staring at me?"

The child, my familiar spirit, gave me the answer. "Everyone is surprised because you have given a present to my Aunt Blanche."

So that was it. I had acted out of character. But I was not yet discovered. "I was in a generous mood," I announced. Then feeling sure Jean's gifts must have been chosen to suit the recipients, I added, "I

hope I have given everybody what they needed most. It's part of my system."

"There's only one present I want," said Paul, "and that's the renewal of the Carvalet contract, and possibly a cheque for ten million francs. You haven't been able to oblige, by any chance?"

"I dislike talking business when I am eating," I said. "I am, on the other hand, perfectly willing to come with you to the *verrerie* this afternoon."

My sense of power was unbounded. I knew nothing about the contract or the business, but I felt my bluff to be superb, and it must have worked, for they were all attacking their plates. As the meal went on I learned that during the war Jean de Gué had fought for the Résistance, that he and Françoise had met and married soon after the Liberation, that Paul had been a prisoner of war, and that he was the younger brother. Judging from his manner, he resented his position.

Renée, whom I had expected to dominate the table, was silent, even sullen, and when Blanche inquired after her migraine she replied briefly that it was as bad as ever.

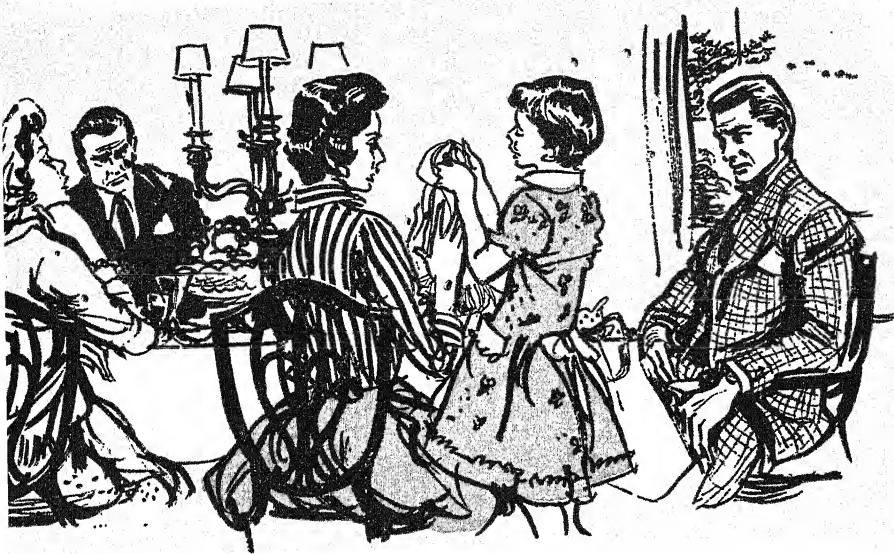
"Perhaps Aunt Renée is getting German measles," said Marie-Noël. "But it wouldn't hurt her if she was, because Aunt Renée isn't going to have a baby."

The remark was unfortunate, Renée flushed and darted a look of venom at her niece, while Françoise, frowning at the child, quickly turned the subject, asking Paul about one of the *verrerie* workmen who had burnt his arm in a furnace.

"If what we pay out in benefits and sickness could only go into the business, we should be better able to face the future," said Paul. "The men seize any excuse to be idle, knowing they will be kept at our expense. It was very different in my father's day."

"Our father had brains and integrity," said Blanche, surprisingly. "His sons unfortunately have neither."





Good for Blanche, I thought, looking towards her in astonishment. Paul, thrusting out his chin and flushing darkly, said swiftly, "Are you suggesting that I am dishonest?"

"No," said Blanche, "misled."

"Please," said Françoise wearily, "must we have this at the table? I thought for once we were going to keep off family affairs."

Dinner was almost over. I felt it was time to ease the tension.

"How about opening the presents?" I said cheerfully. "Come on, Renée, a gift to chase the migraine."

Marie-Noël ran round the table to stand beside her aunt. Reluctantly, I noticed, Renée opened the package. Inside layers of tissue, I caught a glimpse of lace, and Renée paused and said hurriedly, "I'll open it upstairs. I might spill something on it here."

"But what is it?" said Françoise. "A blouse?"

The child forestalled the covering hand of her aunt, and drew from the folded tissue the flimsiest of nightgowns, gossamer light, a frivolity for brides on midsummer eve.

"How pretty," said Françoise. But her tone lacked warmth.

Renée had taken the piece of nonsense away from Marie-Noël and was folding it between the concealing paper. She did not thank me. It



was only then I realized I had made a faux pas. The gift was not intended for public display. Too late to make amends. Paul was staring moodily at his wife, and Françoise wore the false, bright smile of someone who pretends all is well. Marie-Noël was the only one delighted. "You will have to keep that for best, Aunt Renée," she said. "A pity that only Uncle Paul will see you wearing it." She darted round to his side of the table. "I wonder what Papa has given you?"

He shrugged his shoulders. His wife's gift had taken the edge off expectation. "I've no idea. You had better open it," he said.

Excitedly she snipped the string with a knife, while I sought to make excuses for Jean de Gué. At least, I decided, he had brought a present for his brother too. But worse was to come. The child, with puzzled face, drew a small bottle from corrugated wrapping. "It's medicine," she said. "It's called Elixir." And looking at the printed folder enclosed with it she read aloud, "'A hormone preparation to counteract impotence.' . . . What does impotence mean, Papa?"

Paul snatched the bottle from her and turned to me in fury. "If that's your idea of a joke, I don't see it." He got up and went out of the room.

The silence was appalling, and this time I could find no excuses for Jean for such a wanton piece of cruelty. I felt Gaston's gaze on me from the sideboard, and lowered my eyes to my plate. Hostility surrounded me on all sides. Apology was useless. "For what we have received may the Lord make us truly thankful," said Blanche, and rose from her seat. Françoise and Renée followed her, and I was left sitting at the table.

"Aunt Blanche," called the child, "you haven't taken your present." She ran after her, holding the package in her hands.

Gaston came to sweep the crumbs. "If Monsieur le Comte is going to the *verrerie* the car is outside," he said.

I met his eyes and saw reproach. And this upset me, because his devotion gave me confidence.

"What happened just then," I said, "was not intentional."

"No, Monsieur le Comte."

"I had forgotten the contents of the packages."

"Evidently, Monsieur le Comte."

There was no more to say. I went out to the terrace, and drawn up below the steps was the Renault, and Paul waiting by the door.

## CHAPTER 5

THERE WAS NO escaping him. The situation was my responsibility. Whatever Jean de Gué might have intended to do, discreetly and in private, I had now wrecked with brash bonhomie; and in assuming Jean's personality I must make amends for the faults I committed in his name. "You drive," I said to Paul, and climbed in beside him. "I'm sorry for what happened just now," I went on. "The whole thing was a mistake. Everything got mixed up in my valise."

"I don't believe you," he said. "If any gesture was deliberate, yours was, to make me look like a fool in front of everyone."

"I've told you it was a mistake," I said. "Forget it."

He turned out of the village, and took a road into the forest. "I've put up with practical jokes from you all my life," he said, "but there are certain limits. Another thing," he continued, "don't you think it's time you stopped treating Renée as if she were a second Marie-Noël? I object to my wife being turned into a doll merely to gratify your desire for popularity."

The role of apologist was not an easy one. "All women like to be spoiled," I said. "Didn't you see what I gave Françoise? Naturally I brought back something pretty for Renée too."

Paul turned the car to the right, on a sandy by-road. The forest was thinning, and there was a clearing ahead. "Your choice was vulgar and your timing crude," said Paul. "I happened to be watching Françoise as well as Renée. Anyway, next time you decide to give my wife a present, consult me first."

The road narrowed. Before us was a long line of workmen's cottages, and to our right a great shed-like building with a sloping roof and tall stove-pipe chimneys, surrounded by other sheds. From the chimneys came a peculiar gasping, choking sound of smoke expelled by a furnace. Paul drove the car through the open gates, stopping by a small lodge. He got out, and without another word walked away towards a building behind the shed with the high chimneys.

I followed him, and as I picked my way between some trolley rails I realized, from the crunching beneath my feet, that the ground was

covered with minute particles of glass, blue and green and amber, fine as sand upon a beach. Workmen pushing barrows stopped to let us pass, and I noticed that, although they nodded to him, to me they smiled, with camaraderie and warmth, as if they were genuinely glad to see my face.

Paul made straight for a two-storied eighteenth-century house, with a red-tiled, lichen-covered roof, and, opening the door, led the way into a panelled room with a stone floor. There was a table in the middle covered with books and papers, and a big desk in one corner. A bald-headed man with spectacles and hollow cheeks, wearing a dark suit, rose from the table when he saw us.

"*Bonjour*, Monsieur le Comte," he said to me. "You are feeling better, then?"

"There was nothing wrong with me," I said. "I was merely idle."

Paul laughed—the disparaging sound of one who is not amused. "It must be pleasant to lie in bed mornings," he said. "It's something neither Jacques nor I have been able to do for a long time."

The man made a deprecatory gesture, and said quickly, "Is there anything you wish to discuss in private? If so, I can leave you."

"No," said Paul, "the *verrerie's* future is as much your concern as ours. Like you, I am waiting to hear what was achieved in Paris."

They looked at me. I went over to the chair by the desk and sat down. "What do you want to know exactly?" I asked, bending over to light a cigarette. The action enabled me to hide the uncertainty in my face.

"Oh, *mon Dieu* . . ." said Paul in exasperation. "There's only one issue, isn't there? Do we, or do we not, close down?"

Somebody—was it the mother?—had said something about a contract. The visit to Paris hinged on a Carvalet contract. Jean de Gué was expected to bring it back with him. Very well, then, they should have it. "If you mean did I succeed in getting Carvalet to renew the contract, the answer is yes," I said.

Both men stared at me, astounded. Jacques burst out with a "Bravo!" but Paul interrupted, "On what terms, what stipulations?"

"Our terms," I said, "and they made no stipulations."

"You don't mean to tell me they will take our stuff for another six months in spite of the lower quotations from other firms?"

"That's about it."

"I can't understand it. You've achieved something I frankly believed to be impossible. My congratulations."

They began discussing the contract, without reference to me, and I swivelled round in my chair and looked out of the window, wondering what I had been talking about. I saw a tangled orchard, golden in the sun, and a woman with a grey shawl round her shoulders and sabots on her feet, hoeing in a vegetable garden, hens pecking in her path. She was large, elderly, broad-hipped, with a lined brown peasant's face, and when she caught sight of me she smiled and, leaving the hoe, plodded across the ground towards the house. Paul, noticing her for the first time, said, "There's Julie, all ears as usual." He leant out of the window. "Monsieur Jean succeeded in Paris. Don't pretend you don't know what I mean."

The half-smile broadened on the woman's face. She plucked a bunch of grapes dangling from the vine on the wall, and offered it to me with the gesture of a queen. "There you are," she said. "Grown especially for you, Monsieur le Comte. Eat them at once before the bloom is off them."

She went off again to her vegetables, and turning my head I saw that Paul was hanging up his coat and putting on overalls. "There's not been much correspondence in since you were away," he said. "It's all on the desk. Jacques will show you."

He went out, and I was left alone with Jacques and a little stack of letters, invoices, inquiries from other firms. As I looked through them I knew that I understood absolutely nothing of what I was supposed to dictate or write. To speak the truth was the only way out. I swept them all aside and said, "What is all this? What do you want me to do about it?" Jacques smiled and replied, "These are only routine matters, Monsieur le Comte. I can deal with them."

I got up, went to the open door and looked out on the line of sheds, the workmen passing to and fro with wheelbarrows, a lorry being driven out of the gates, the pleasing, incongruous proximity of farm buildings some fifty yards from the foundry itself. Geese were strutting in the farm-yard, and mingling with the lowing of cattle from beyond the farm gate came the intermittent clanging of metal within the shed. I knew instinctively that all this had been happening for two or three

hundred years, that wars and the Revolution had not altered it. It continued because the family and the workmen believed in it, because they wanted it that way, and to destroy it would be like tearing the roots of a live thing from the soil.

I said to Jacques, "How long can a factory like this compete against big firms with modern machinery, paying high wages?"

"That depends on you, Monsieur le Comte. We know it's a rich man's hobby that has become a liability to you. If you don't mind losing money it's your affair. Only . . . ."

"Only what?"

"You would not be losing quite so much today if a little more trouble had been taken in the past to look after what belongs to you. Forgive me, I am being frank. How can I put it to you, Monsieur le Comte? A business is like a home: it must have a head, a centre, and depending upon that centre it either thrives or falls to pieces. Your father was much respected, and Monsieur Duval was another like him. Had he lived he would have made his home here in the house, and there would have been a sense of continuity. But as things are . . . ." He looked at me apologetically, unable to finish his sentence.

"Are you blaming me or my brother?" I asked.

"Neither, Monsieur le Comte. Circumstances have been against us all. Monsieur Paul has a great sense of duty, but he has been fighting a losing battle against costs and wages, and you know he is not at ease with the workmen. Sometimes that makes things difficult."

I thought how unenviable was this man's position, the buffer, the go-between, cursed probably by employer and employed, yet bearing on his shoulders the real sweat and toil of the business—checking orders, pacifying creditors, working overtime, the last prop and support of a tottering system.

"You are not offended, Monsieur le Comte, at what I said?" Jacques asked with a touching humility.

"No," I answered. "No, I'm grateful."

I went out, crossing to the main foundry shed. Inside, near the furnace, the men were working stripped because of the heat. All round me were vats and tubs, and rods, and connecting pipes, and there was a roar and a clanging and an odd pungent smell which was not unpleasant.

Moving on to the other sheds, where men in overalls were working with different tools, I turned in my hands the blues and greens and ambers of rejected glass that seemed to me perfect, little *flacons* and bottles of every shape and size.

Presently I went out again and got into the Renault and drove back towards St. Gilles. Before the road dipped to the village, I stopped, lit a cigarette, and looked down at the country below.

I wished I could feel detached: could look down on St. Gilles and the château with dispassionate eyes. My morning mood had somehow gone awry. The feeling of amusement, of power, had turned to shame. I had exchanged my own negligible self for a worthless personality. He had the supreme advantage over me in that he had not cared. Or had he, after all? Was this why he had disappeared?

I drove on to the château and asked Gaston to take the car back to the *verrière* for Paul. Then I went indoors. Upstairs, in the dressing-room, I found the packet of letters that I remembered seeing in the valise. Among them was one with the name and address of the Carvalet people stamped on the back. I read it through, and it was as I feared. They said that they regretted their unfavourable decision, in view of so much business between us in the past; but on further consideration they found themselves unable to renew their contract.

I DID NOT, for the moment, mind about Jacques or the family at the château. Presumably they had prepared themselves for the worst, and were merely surprised and relieved that they were able to believe the contrary. I minded, immediately, for the workmen whom I had seen at the *verrière* this afternoon, sweating beside that furnace, or working in the sheds at their separate skilled tasks.

The thing that puzzled me most was why I cared. Their scorn and disenchantment when they learned that I had lied to them could not touch my inviolate self. This person who walked about wearing another's clothes was guiltless, merely a covering, a façade. What was happening, then, was that I wanted to preserve Jean de Gué from degradation. I could not bear to see him shamed. Why? Because he looked like me?

I sat in the dressing-room, staring at the letter from Carvalet. I knew I must come to a decision—either to tell Paul directly that I had lied

about the contract, or to allow him to go on believing it had gone through.

I put the letter in my pocket and went downstairs. It was almost four o'clock. There was no one about, and a feeling of *sies'ta* brooded over the place. I found the telephone, jammed between mackintoshes in a dark closet: an old-fashioned instrument, the mouthpiece fastened to the wall and the receiver hanging at one side.

I unhooked the receiver and waited, and after a moment there was a buzz and a nasal voice intoned, "*J'écoute.*" I asked for the Paris number on Carvalet's letter, and waited for what seemed eternity, crouched in my dark hole, until I reached the Monsieur Mercier who had signed the letter, and identified myself as Jean de Gué.

"Monsieur," I said, "a thousand apologies for disturbing you, also for my discourtesy in not acknowledging your letter. I was obliged to return home very suddenly, owing to illness in my family. I have now seen my brother and gone over the points you and I discussed, and we are prepared to lower our figure and meet your demands."

There was silence, and then a polite but exceedingly surprised voice answered, "But Monsieur le Comte, this is in complete contradiction to what you yourself gave us to understand."

"What you are saying is perfectly correct," I said, "but I have changed my mind. I will agree to any proviso, if we can continue to keep the foundry working. I am asking you to renew your contract on your own terms, whatever they may be."

A more prolonged silence. Then, swiftly, "Monsieur, we have had a long connection with you and your family, and we were upset that it should be severed. If you are now prepared to meet us over figures, I will again consult my fellow directors. I see no reason why the result should not be satisfactory to us both."

We exchanged final compliments, and he hung up. I reached for my handkerchief and wiped the sweat off my forehead. I had committed myself to something without having the slightest idea of how to carry it through. If the price Carvalet paid did not cover costs, then the money would have to come from another source.

It was at this moment that I heard someone breathing down the receiver, which I still held, unthinking, against my ear: the

unmistakable sound of a person listening at an extension. Presently the exchange cut in, asking if I had finished with Paris, and when I said yes, and the line went dead, I heard the breathing again, and then a gentle click, proving that whoever listened within the château had now hung up.

Discovery of the extension, and of the eavesdropper, were things that must wait. I felt it more immediately important to find out something about Jean de Gué's finances. The half-finished cheque-book in the dressing-room upstairs, which I went to fetch, bore cryptic figures but no balance, and its only worth-while information was the name and address of the bank in Villars, a neighbouring town. There was no desk in the dressing-room. Somewhere in the château there must be a room where the owner wrote his letters and kept personal possessions. I remembered the library where the family had assembled before lunch. To be sure—there was a desk in the corner. Inside it there was a muddle and disorder of envelopes spilling their contents, letters, bills, receipts, all thrown in haphazard. I wanted bank statements and I could not find them, only the stubs of cheque-books long since used and put away. Finally, my eye caught by the red leather cover of what might be a ledger, I tugged and squeezed it out of the reluctant drawer and found it to be an album of photographs, most of them faded.

I let the bank statements go. A glimpse at the past was irresistible. The album bore a crest on the first page, and underneath, "Marie de Gué" in a long sloping hand. When I turned the page there was the mother, unmistakably, a young woman in her mid-twenties, the present heavy jaw a rounded and determined chin, the shock of grey hair blonde, profuse, a frilly blouse adorning the sloping shoulders that were now hunched and covered with a multitude of wraps. Beside it was the date, 1914. Then followed, one by one, the others: Jean de Gué, the father, suggesting Paul but with a bristling moustache, the eyes alert; mother and father together, gazing with fond pride at a much be-ribboned Blanche; then a small Jean and Blanche straddling a pony, and the same pair posed in mufflers, their arms round each other's necks. The couple were seldom apart in the pictures. Wherever Jean stood, holding fishing-rod or gun, Blanche would be lurking—almost a replica of the Marie-Noel of today, with the same long legs, thin body and



cropped hair. When she must have been about fifteen, she began to change, the expression in the eyes becoming more watchful, more solemn; but even so I could not recognize in that grave and surely sympathetic face the tight-lipped spinster of today.

The young Jean was never solemn. Every snapshot showed laughter, or a comic attitude, or some mockery of the camera. Paul did not figure much in the album. He was often out of focus, the dimmest figure in a group, half obscured by Jean's robust shoulder or eclipsed by Jean's devastating smile. A man called Maurice appeared often in the latter pages of the album, amongst groups at the glass-foundry or at the château; and there was one of him and Jean together, standing by the stone statue in the park. Then, abruptly, the snapshots ended. An era was over, a cycle closed.

I shut the album with a curious feeling of nostalgia. This furtive glance at the family background was oddly moving. I minded not that the handsome countess should grow old, but that she had aged in the way she had, those dominating, confident eyes turned restless, the proud mouth voracious. I minded that Blanche, so winning as a child, so serious and watchful as a growing girl, could become warped out of recognition, crude as a caricature.

These pictures of a past when all seemed well were disturbed by an intrusion from the present. I heard the child's voice calling: "Papa? Where are you?"

"In here. Do you want me?"

She burst into the room. "Gran'mie is awake," she said. "I have been telling her about the presents, and how disappointed Uncle Paul was in his. And do you know, Papa, you made a mistake with the one for my Aunt Blanche? She would not open it, so Maman and I unwrapped it for her, and inside was a note, 'For my beautiful Béla, from Jean,' not Blanche at all, and it was an enormous bottle of scent called '*Femme*,' in a lovely box wrapped in cellophane, and the price upon it still, ten thousand francs." She paused. "It's a funny thing, Papa, but everybody seems to be in a bad mood about those presents. Maman was so pleased with hers this morning, but now she has taken it off and put it with the rest of the things in her jewel case. She said, 'I'm afraid all this has been a joke after all, and rather a cruel one.'"

## CHAPTER 6

THIS SECOND evening of my masquerade took shape and substance like a second night at school. I was familiar now with my surroundings, and my audacity, an intoxicating drug the night before, seemed natural. When I opened a door or came face to face with one of the family I no longer felt a shock of surprise.

Dinner that night was a silent affair. We were only four. Marie-Noël, I discovered, had soup and biscuits at seven and did not join us, while Blanche, according to Gaston, wished to fast. Françoise, the prop at lunch, looked tired, and with flagging interest touched upon little topics to stir the silence: illness in the village, a letter from a cousin in Orléans. Her voice, when the complaint was out of it, was clear and pleasant. Renée, wearing a high-necked blouse that became her well, with hair brushed up to show her ears, had put a spot of rouge on either cheekbone, perhaps to dazzle me with her charm. I was unmoved, and Paul did not even notice. He concentrated upon his food; and directly dinner was over he moved to a chair under the best light in the salon, and, lighting a cigar, was hidden to view by the wide-open sheets of *Figaro* and *L'Ouest-France*.

Françoise and I played draughts while Renée toyed with a book until nine o'clock, when we bade each other good night, pairing off like couples at a set of lancers.

I went into the dressing-room and opened the window. The chestnut trees were still, and there were no stars. As I lit a cigarette with the thought that twenty-four hours or more had passed since I came to St. Gilles, I knew that the sins of Jean de Gué had been increased tenfold by his scapegoat; that everything I had said or done had implicated me further, driven me deeper, bound me more closely still to that man whose thoughts and actions were a world apart from mine, and yet whose inner substance was part of my nature, part of my secret self.

WHEN I awoke the next morning I knew there was something urgent I had to do. Then I remembered the telephone conversation with Carvalet, and how I had committed the *verrière* to continued production on

their terms, without the remotest knowledge of the family resources. Somehow I had to get to Jean de Gué's bank in Villars and talk to the manager about the financial situation, inventing some excuse for my ignorance.

I got up, bathed and dressed. I no longer had my maps, but Villars should be easy enough to find. When Gaston came into the dressing-room to brush my clothes I told him I was going to the bank, and wanted the Renault round ten.

"Very well," he said. "Monsieur Paul can take the Citroën to the *verrière*."

I had forgotten there was a second car. This would simplify matters. There would be no suggestion of Paul's coming with me to the bank, which I had feared. I was reckoning, though, without the complications of family shopping. Gaston must have mentioned my intention, for I was just about to go downstairs when the little *femme de chambre* knocked at the door.

"Excuse me, Monsieur le Comte," she said, "but may Madame Paul go with you to Villars? She has an appointment with the *coiffeur*."

The last thing I wanted was another tête-à-tête with Madame Paul, but there seemed no possibility of excuse. I wondered if her appointment was a deliberate scheme for my company. I told Germaine that of course I would take Madame Paul to the *coiffeur*, and then, with a sudden inspiration, went into the bedroom, where I found Françoise sitting up in bed.

"I'm going into Villars," I said. "Do you want to come?"

Then I remembered that surely every husband kisses his wife good morning, and I kissed her and asked her how she had slept.

"I was restless," she said. "No, I can't come into Villars. I shall stay in bed. I'm expecting Dr. Lebrun some time this morning. Why must you go? I had hoped you would see him."

"I have to go to the bank," I said. "I've got business to discuss." In an attempt to ease my conscience, I added, "It won't be long. I'll probably be back before he's gone."

She did not answer. Germaine came in to take away the breakfast tray, and behind her Marie-Noël, who, having kissed us in turn, immediately demanded to be taken into Villars too.

Here was the perfect counter-plot to Renée: I wondered I had not thought of it myself. When I said that she might come the child watched me with dancing eyes, wriggling impatiently while her mother brushed her hair.

"It's market day," said Françoise. "Jean, don't let her go wandering in the market."

"I'll look after her," I said. "Anyway, Renée is coming too."

"Renée? Whatever for?"

"She has an appointment at the *coiffeur*," said Marie-Noel. "As soon as she heard Papa was going into Villars, she came to Aunt Blanche's room to telephone."

"But she washed her hair only a few days ago," said Françoise.

I heard the child say something about Aunt Renée wanting to look nice for "*la chasse*," but I did not listen. I fastened on the information that the telephone extension was in Blanche's room. Blanche, then, had listened when I spoke to Paris. If not Blanche, who else? And how much had been heard?

"I'll try and keep Dr. Lebrun until you come back," Françoise was saying now, "but you know how he is, he never can stay long."

"What's he going to do?" asked Marie-Noel.

"He's going to listen to baby brother," said Françoise.

The child looked from one to the other of us, anxious, expectant, and then, for no apparent reason, suddenly turned a cartwheel.

"Look out . . ." warned Françoise, but it was too late. The flying feet overbalanced and crashed upon a little table near the fire-place, smashing a porcelain cat and dog on the hearth. The child picked herself up, scarlet in the face, and looked at her mother, who sat up in bed gazing at the disaster, stunned.

"My cat and dog," she said, "my favourite pieces. The two my mother gave me that I brought from home." A tumult of feeling must have swept over her on that instant, breaking all control, and the bitterness of months, perhaps of years, surged to the surface.

"You little beast," she said to the child, "with your horrible clumsy feet, smashing the only things I possess and value in this house. Why doesn't your father teach you discipline and manners instead of filling your head with all this nonsense about saints and visions? Now leave

me, both of you. I don't want either of you here. *Leave me alone. . .*"

The child, her face drained of colour, ran from the room. I went over to the bed. "Françoise . . ." I began.

She pushed me away, her eyes tormented. "No," she said. "No . . . no . . . no . . ." She flung herself back on her pillows, burying herself against them, and, in a futile endeavour to be useful, I picked up the porcelain fragments and carried them into the dressing-room. Mechanically I wrapped them in the cellophane and paper from the bottle of scent. There was no sign of Marie-Noël, and, remembering the threat of the open window, I ran out of the dressing-room and up the back stairs to the turret room. But when I came to the room I saw with relief that the window was closed, and that she was undressing, folding her clothes neatly on a chair. "What are you doing?" I asked.

"I've been naughty," she said. "Don't I have to go to bed?"

"I don't think it would do much good," I said. "And, anyway, you were not naughty. It was bad luck. You didn't intend to break the figures. The thing to do now is to try and have them mended. Put your dress on again, then come downstairs. It's nearly ten o'clock."

I went back and picked up the broken pieces in their wrapping paper. Downstairs, Renée was standing in the hall.

"I hope I haven't kept you waiting," she said.

There was a world of anticipation in her voice, excitement and avidity in her face, as she walked out of the house and down the steps. Then the child came running across the terrace after us.

"I'm coming with you, Aunt Renée," she said, "but it's not a treat. I have some rather serious shopping to do."

I had never seen expression alter so swiftly from assurance to dismay. For a moment I thought Renée was going to return to the château, the frustration was so shattering. Then she pulled herself together, and without looking at me got into the back of the car.

I need not have worried about the road to Villars. The truth, as usual, proved an easy way out of difficulty.

"We will pretend," I said to Marie-Noël, "that I'm a stranger and don't know the way, and that you have to direct me."

"Oh yes," she said, "what a good idea."

It was as simple as that. Soon we were out of the magic of farm and



forest and back on the hard, straight *route nationale* and so to Villars, the child announcing each turn in a sing-song chant.

"We'll drop Aunt Renée at the *coiffeur* and put the car in the Place de la République afterwards," said Marie-Noël. I stopped in front of the small establishment with the waxen lady's head in the window and opened the door for Renée, who got out without a word.

"What time will you be ready?" I asked, but she did not answer. She went straight into the shop with never a backward glance.

The absence of Renée put an end to restraint, and my mood, like the child's, turned festive. We found parking-space, and plunged into the market in the Place beside the church.

Nothing was on a grand scale, as it had been in Le Mans. Only trestle tables crammed together in a small space, spilling over with aprons, jackets, mackintoshes, sabots; and the child and I moved leisurely between them, our eyes caught foolishly by the same objects. We bought some grey-and-white checked slippers for Germaine; yellow boot laces, both for ourselves and for Gaston; and two sponges on a string, and finally a great hunk of milk-white soap, a mermaid riding a dolphin embossed upon its surface.

We turned in the crowded alley, laden with our wares, and I saw we were being watched with intense amusement by a blonde woman in a bright blue coat, her arms full of red and gold dahlias. As she brushed past us, going in the opposite direction towards the church, she murmured for my ear alone, "*Père de famille* for a change?"

I looked back at the blue coat swinging down the alley, amused, intrigued, and then Marie-Noel, pulling at me, said, "Oh, Papa, there's a little lace cloth——" and we were involved in purchases once more. I forgot all about my purpose in coming to Villars, until the church bell boomed half past eleven and I thought, aghast, of the bank closing at twelve, and nothing achieved.

"Hurry," I said, and we went and spilt our purchases in the car.

"Papa," said the child, "we've never seen about mending the broken porcelain for Maman," and, looking at her, I saw anxiety in her face, the happiness gone. "Couldn't I go to the shop by the Porte de Ville, you know, where they have candlesticks, and see if they would mend the porcelain, and then come and meet you at the bank?" She stared up at me expectantly.

"Where is it?" I said. "I've forgotten."

"Just inside the Porte de Ville," she said impatiently. "Next to the umbrella shop. And then I'll come back past the church and straight to the bank. It's barely four minutes."

"All right," I said, "here's the parcel. Be careful, now." I put the broken pieces in their wrappings into her hands.

I watched her across the road and then turned left to the obvious bank

building standing at the corner. I pushed through the doors, and was met by a clerk. "Good morning, Monsieur le Comte," he said. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Yes," I answered, "I want to know how my account stands."

"Which one, Monsieur?"

"All of them. I want the full statements."

He disappeared, returning presently with a sheaf of papers. "Perhaps you would like to take a seat in the office, Monsieur le Comte?" he said, and he led the way to a small room with a glass door.

He left me, and as I turned the papers I realized that I was as lost before these columns of figures as I had been before the bills and statements in the *verrière*. I looked them over one by one, but could make nothing of them, and then the clerk returned to find out whether I wanted any more information.

"Is this all?" I asked. "You have no other papers of mine?"

He looked at me inquiringly, a little puzzled, and said, "No, Monsieur le Comte, unless, of course, there is anything you wish to look at in your safe in the vault."

"Is there time for me to look in it before you close?" I asked.

"Certainly," he replied, and I followed him down a long flight of stairs to the basement. He unlocked a door, and we were in a vast, low room like a cellar, the walls lined with safes, all numbered. He left me gazing at the contents of number seventeen, another mass of papers, all of them tied with tape. Oddly disappointed, I took them to the light. The title of a document caught my eye, "Marriage Settlement of Françoise Bruyère," and I was beginning to untie the tape when the clerk returned.

"Your little girl is outside," he said. "She asked me to tell you that everything is arranged about the porcelain, and can she go back in the lorry with Madame Yves?"

I had heard somewhere that Julie, the concierge at the foundry lodge, was Madame Yves. "All right," I said, preoccupied; "tell her I'll be along in a moment." I had the tape undone and had opened the document. I sat down and began to read.

The father of Françoise, a Monsieur Robert Bruyère, had evidently been a rich man with little faith in the stability of Jean de Gué, and no



desire to bolster his tottering fortunes. Her dowry, which was considerable, was therefore in trust for a male heir, but the income could be used during the minority of the said heir, husband and wife having joint control over it. In default of a son, when Françoise reached the age of fifty the trust funds were to be divided between her and any surviving daughters of the marriage, or, if she predeceased her husband before she reached the age of fifty, between the husband and any daughters. The point was that the income from this vast trust could only be used by the parents on the birth of a male heir, and if no male child was born no one could touch a sou until Françoise reached the age of fifty—unless, of course, she were to die before that age.

I read the document over a dozen times, and I understood at last the allusions to the advantage of the next child being a boy. Poor Marie-Noel, no trust money for her if a brother came along. As to Jean de Gué, he could control half the capital only if there was no heir and Françoise died before the age of fifty.

"Excuse me, Monsieur le Comte, but will you be much longer? We close at twelve, and it is already twenty past."

The clerk stood beside me, wearing an injured expression, and with an effort I brought myself back to reality.

"I'm coming," I said. "I didn't realize it was so late."

As I put the documents back in the safe, a paper fell out which had not been tied up in tape with the others, but seemed to have been thrust in hastily. I glanced at it, and saw that it was a letter from a lawyer called Talbert, written two or three weeks earlier. Odd words caught my eye—"verrerie," "rentes," "placements," "dividendes"—and, sensing that here might be the clue to the whole financial tangle, I put it in my pocket.

The clerk led me upstairs and let me out, locking the door behind me. I started out in the direction I had seen Marie-Noel take: I must discover what she had done about the broken porcelain. In due course I came to the Porte de Ville, an ancient gateway to the once fortified town, with a stone bridge over the canal where the drawbridge used to be. I passed under the archway to what was evidently the main shopping street of the town, and at once I saw, on the right-hand side, the place that the child must have meant, an antique shop with china and

silver in the window. But the door was fast shut, and there was a notice saying they closed from midday until three.

I turned away, then paused, noticing with vague curiosity that the rear of the antique shop itself was in reality a small eighteenth-century house, with a balcony and strip of garden fronting the canal like a miniature *palazzo* on a Venetian backwater. A narrow plank bridge led from the road to the garden. As I stood there, someone came out on the balcony and I recognized in an instant the blonde woman in the bright blue coat who had laughed at Marie-Noel and myself in the market place. Was she the keeper of the antique shop?

"Excuse me, Madame," I called, "I tried the shop just now, but the door was locked. Did my daughter visit you this morning?"

The woman turned round, surprised, and then to my astonishment burst into laughter. "Idiot," she said. "I thought you'd gone home. What are you doing, hanging about and playing the fool?"

The familiarity, the use of the intimate "*tu*," shook me off balance. I could only stare. She looked away, past the Porte de Ville to the Place St. Julien. It was the siesta hour: the streets were empty. "There's no one about," she said. "Come on in."

The reputation of Jean de Gué in Villars was evidently a light one. I hesitated, and then, glancing across the square, saw Renée, whom I had forgotten all about, long finished at the *coiffeur*, tramping the town in search of me. Since Marie-Noel had gone off in a lorry, I should have to drive Renée back to St. Gilles alone. I was trapped. The woman in the blue coat followed my eyes and saw my dilemma. "Quick," she said, "she hasn't seen you yet."

I dashed across the little bridge and on to the balcony, and, laughing still, she pulled me into the room. "There's luck," she said. "A moment later she'd have caught us."

She shut the long window and turned to me, smiling, the same look of amusement on her face that I had noticed and indeed shared in the market place. But now there was nothing guarded about it; her whole expression was open and free.

"That child of yours is adorable," she said, "but it was very naughty of you to send her here. And why for heaven's sake did you wrap up those pieces of broken porcelain with a card addressed to me? One of

these days, my angel, your jokes will go too far. I'll see to your broken porcelain, but after this don't use your child or your wife or your sister as your deputy, because it's making fools of them and I have too much respect for your family."

She put her hand in her pocket and produced a crumpled card, on which was written "For my beautiful Béla, from Jean." The dog and cat lay in pieces on a table. The only link that was missing was the outsize bottle of "*Femme*."

## CHAPTER 7

ALTHOUGH she had closed the long window, the casement curtains masking the view, the room was full of sun. I had an impression of blue-grey walls and cushions, but the effect, instead of being cold, was light as air. The red and gold dahlias that I had seen her carrying from the market place spilt in profusion from a vase in the corner, the sun upon them still. Deep chairs stood about the room, and a Persian cat cleaned its paws in one of them. Close to the window was a low flat table with artist's materials upon it, thin, small brushes and a special sort of paper. There was a smell of apricots.

"Why are you in Villars in the middle of the day?" she asked.

"I went to the bank," I said, "and forgot the time. I was supposed to pick up one of the family from the *coiffeur*."

"You've left it until rather late," she said. "Does she enjoy walking about the streets?" She went to a corner cupboard and brought out a bottle of Dubonnet and two glasses. "Are you going to have lunch with me? It's all here—ham, salad, cheese, fruit and coffee." She opened a hatchway between this room and another, and there was a tray laid ready, with food upon it.

"How can I," I asked, "with my sister-in-law waiting for me?"

She went to the window, opened it, and looked out to the Place St. Julien. "She's not there any more. If she has any sense she will go and sit in the car, and then, when she becomes tired of waiting drive back to St. Gilles."

I wondered if Renée could drive. I did not care. I felt suddenly devoid of responsibility and content to let things take their course.

"You can imagine how I felt," she said, "when Vincent came to me and told me that your small daughter was in the shop asking if we would mend something very precious belonging to her mother. I couldn't imagine what had happened—for a moment I thought your wife had found out that I had done the miniature. Did you give it to her? Did she like it?"

I paused a moment, considering my words. "Yes," I said, "yes, it was a great success. She was very pleased."

"I'm so glad. It was a marvellous idea of yours, and must have come to you in one of your better moments. The dog and cat won't mend, but I can get duplicates from Paris. They're Copenhagen—I suppose you realized that? Come on, let's eat. I'm hungry, if you are not."

She laid the table, drawing it up to my chair, and I thought to myself that this was, so far, the most effortless moment of my masquerade. It could be termed a gift, even, on the part of Fate, which had been sparing of indulgence up to date.

Eating the ham and salad, it struck me how much more pleasant was lunch today, with this woman opposite me, than it had been yesterday in the dining-room at the château. This train of thought led me to the one undelivered present. "There's a bottle of scent for you," I said, "on the chest in the dressing-room at St. Gilles."

"Thank you. Am I supposed to go and fetch it?" she asked.

I told her about the mistake in the initial B, and she looked bewildered. "I don't see how it happened," she said, "since you and your sister have not spoken for fifteen years."

Fifteen years . . . Then Blanche's disapproval was so deep-rooted that it must affect the relationship of the entire family. The revelation was disturbing, even sinister, especially when I remembered the snapshots of the two children with their arms about each other.

"My mind wasn't functioning properly," I said lamely at last. "Too much to drink in Le Mans the day before."

She raised her eyebrows. "The Paris visit was unsuccessful?"

"Very unsuccessful." I told her, then, of my telephone commitment to Carvalet. "That's why I went to the bank this morning—to see if I can stand the loss. I still don't know the answer."

Her wide blue eyes were fixed upon me. "But you told me before you

went to Paris that if Carvalet wouldn't agree to your terms you were going to close down."

"That wouldn't be fair to the workpeople."

"Since when have you bothered about the workpeople?"

"Since I got drunk in Le Mans."

There was the sound of a door in the distance. She got up and went to the passage. "Is that you, Vincent?" she called.

"Yes, Madame."

"Go and see if the Comte de Gué's car is in the Place de la République, and if there is a lady waiting in it."

"Very good, Madame."

She poured me another glass of wine, cut a slice of Gruyère cheese and gave it to me. "You know," she said, "it's a good thing, now and again, to take stock of oneself, to see where one has gone wrong. I sometimes wonder why I go on living here in Villars. I barely make a living out of the shop, and I exist mainly on what Georges left me, which is precious little these days."

Was Georges perhaps a husband? Some kind of comment seemed necessary. "Why *do* you go on living here?" I asked.

She shrugged her shoulders. "Habit, I suppose. It suits me. I'm fond of this little house. If you think I exist for your occasional visits, you flatter yourself." She began to peel a pear and gave me the quarters from it. "You make a mistake leaving so much of the administrative part of the foundry to your brother. If you weren't so infernally lazy you would do it yourself."

"That had occurred to me, but I don't understand it."

"That's nonsense. You've watched it since you were a child, and you must have picked up a working knowledge. I sometimes wonder if your lack of feeling for the *verrière* is because you don't want to think about it too deeply. You don't want to be reminded of what happened to Maurice Duval."

I was silent. This was the fringe of something. Jacques, at the *verrière*, had spoken of Monsieur Duval: and Maurice was the man in the photograph album by the side of Jean de Gué.

"It could be," I said slowly, after a moment or two.

"The Occupation was over fifteen years ago," she said, "his part of it.

Yet people go on remembering him—what a fine man he was, and how he died. It can hardly make for peace of mind for those involved."

There was a tap at the door and a small thin man, wearing a beret, looked into the room. He smiled when he saw me.

"*Bonjour, Monsieur le Comte,*" he said. "There was no lady in the car. But there was this note on the seat."

He handed it to me with a bow. It was short and to the point. "I have been looking for you and Marie-Noel for nearly an hour. I have hired a car to take me home. R." I showed it to my hostess.

"Now you can relax," she said.

She had thrown off the bright blue jacket, revealing a thin wool frock of indeterminate grey. It was restful to look upon her, and to know that in this room nothing was expected of me. I wondered how often Jean de Gué came here from the château and sat with his head against a cushion, as I was doing now. Her casual friendliness held a quality of ease suggesting mutual understanding without emotional demand.

She gazed at me thoughtfully. The candid eyes were disconcerting. "What's the matter?" she said. "It's not just finance, is it? It goes much deeper. What really happened to you in Le Mans?"

I closed my eyes, stroking the cat which had jumped on my knee. Safety lay in evasion, and in the truth as well.

"You said something a little while ago about taking stock of oneself," I said. "Perhaps that's just what I've been doing, over a period of time, and it came to a head that evening in Le Mans. The self I knew had failed. The only way to escape responsibility for failure was to become someone else. Let another personality take charge."

"The other Jean de Gué," she said, "the one who's been hidden for so long beneath the surface gaiety and charm—I've often wondered if he existed. But no one avoids responsibility by finding another self. The problems remain to be tackled just the same."

"No," I said. "The problems and responsibilities are new, because the man in charge is somebody else."

My eyes still closed, I heard her get up and carry the tray to the hatch. Then she came back and sat on the arm of my chair.

"How does he seem to you, then, the man in charge?" she asked.

"I think he has twisted ideas, but he's come terribly near to the truth."

He says he believes that the only motive which moves the human race is greed, and by ministering to this greed he himself survives. The thing is, it isn't greed at all, it's hunger. And if it's hunger, what about the conflicting claims? Mother, wife, child, brother, sister-in-law, even workpeople—I can't satisfy them all. Frankly, I don't know where to start or what to do."

She did not answer, but I felt a soothing hand on my head.

I put out my hands and felt her face. "I don't want to have to think," I said.

She laughed, and, hardly brushing them, kissed my closed eyes. "That's why you come here, isn't it?" she said.

AS I ENTERED the château in the late afternoon Paul came out of the small cloakroom to the right of the stairs.

"Where the devil have you been all day?" he asked. "We've been trying to get you since one o'clock. Lebrun waited until two, and then had to go. He's just been through to me again."

"What's wrong?" I inquired.

"What's wrong?" he repeated. "Only that Françoise isn't at all well, and Lebrun has forbidden her to move from bed. If she isn't careful she'll have a premature baby and lose it, and more than likely be critically ill herself. That's all that's wrong."

The contempt in his voice was something I had to accept. The fault was not Jean de Gué's but mine. I had promised to be back in time to see the doctor. I had not kept the promise.

"What's his number?" I asked. "I'll get on to him at once."

"No use," he said. "He's been called out again. I told him to try you later this evening."

He turned on his heel and disappeared into the library. I went straight upstairs to the bedroom. Françoise was lying against her pillows with closed eyes. She opened them as I came into the room.

"Oh, it's you," she said, "at last. I'd given you up long ago. I told them you'd probably taken the train back to Paris."

The voice was flat, expressionless. I took her hand. "I should have telephoned," I said. "I was held up in Villars. How are you feeling? Paul tells me Lebrun has ordered you to stay in bed."

The hand in mine felt limp and cold. She did not take it away. "If I don't I shall lose the baby," she said. "I've always known something would go wrong."

"It won't go wrong," I said. "The question is, how good is Lebrun? Wouldn't you like me to call in a specialist?"

"No," she said, "I don't want a stranger interfering at this point, upsetting me, upsetting Lebrun. I shall be all right as long as I stay quiet and nobody worries me." The tired eyes searched my face. "What with Marie-Noel coming back in the workmen's lorry, and you disappearing, I've been almost frantic with anxiety."

"I had a long session at the bank," I said. "I don't mind telling you, but I don't want the others to know. The fact is, I lied about the contract." And I told her the truth about it.

She looked bewildered. "What was the point of lying?" she asked. "I don't understand."

"I suppose it was pride," I said. "I wanted everyone to believe I had succeeded. Well, perhaps I have succeeded, for a time. But I want you to keep this to yourself. I don't intend telling anyone except you unless absolutely necessary."

She smiled for the first time, and, as she half raised herself on her pillow, I saw that she meant me to kiss her. I did so, and let go her hand.

"I won't tell anybody," she said. "I'm only too glad that you've taken me into your confidence for once." She lay back on her pillows. Then she said, "You might get me the locket you brought me from Paris. I think I'll keep it here on the table."

I went to the dressing-table in the alcove, took the small jewel case I saw there, and gave it to her. She looked at the locket, snapping the miniature open as she had done before. "You'd better go down and make your peace with Renée," she said. "You know how impossible she can be when she loses her temper."

"She'll get over it."

I closed the shutters, and then I put a log on the fire.

"I suppose the child's with Blanche," she said. "I haven't felt well enough to see her. Tell her I didn't mean what I said this morning, that I was ill and wretched."



"I think she understood that."

"What did you do with the broken pieces?"

"I've seen to them. Is there anything else you want?"

"No. No, I shall just go on lying here quietly."

I went out into the corridor, and came face to face with Charlotte.

"Monsieur le Curé has just gone," she said. "Madame la Comtesse has been asking for you."

"I'll go to her now," I said.

Once again she preceded me up the stairs. The mother was again sitting by the fire, her massive shoulders draped in a purple shawl. I bent and kissed her, relieved to see that she was alone.

"Good morning and good evening," I said. "I'm sorry I never came to see you this morning. I left early. I'm glad to see you up. Have you had a good day?"

The mocking, questing eyes met mine, and she grunted and pointed to a chair. "Sit down," she said, "there with the light on your face, so that I can see you. Get out, Charlotte. And no listening at the door. Go down to the kitchen and order two trays for dinner. Go on, hurry up." The terriers climbed up and settled themselves on her lap, and she remained silent until the servant went out of the room. I lighted a cigarette, feeling her eyes upon me still. "Well," she said, "where were you?"

"I had business," I said.

"You left the bank before half past twelve," she said, "and it's now half past six."

I smiled. The itching curiosity was blatant, like a child's.

"If you want the truth," I said, "I was trying to avoid Renée. And I succeeded. That's all I'm going to tell you."

She chuckled, and I saw that once again my instinct not to lie had proved my salvation. "I don't blame you," she said. "Don't give in to her, or she'll prove insatiable."

"She hasn't enough to do," I said. "None of you women have enough to do."

"I had plenty to do once," she said, "when your father was alive, in the old days, before the war and before you married. There were no women idle then. I had something to live for. So had Blanche."

The sudden venom in her voice startled me. I looked up, and the mouth was narrow, hard, like her daughter's, and the eyes that had mocked me a moment ago were veiled under the hooded lids.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"You know very well what I mean." Then her expression changed again, and she shrugged her shoulders. "I'm old and ill, that's my trouble," she said, "and it bores me, as it will bore you when your time comes. We're too much alike. How is Françoise this evening?"

I felt I had been near to some inner core of revelation, but the new question came from another quarter, the quiet, elaborately casual tone was that of someone without heart or feeling.

"As you know, I missed Lebrun," I said. "He's going to telephone me later. She has to stay in bed. She isn't at all well."

"I saw Lebrun," she said. "He won't tell you any more than he told me. He's a bungler, and won't admit it. She's going to have trouble with this baby, as she did with the last—I've known it all along."

"She doesn't want a specialist. I suggested it just now."

"You suggested it?" she asked. "Whatever for?"

"Why, surely," I said, "if there's going to be any trouble . . . ." Unaccountably, her eyes meeting mine, discomfort seized me. I remembered the terms of the Marriage Settlement, and that if Françoise died without giving birth to a son the whole vast dowry would be divided between Jean de Gué and Marie-Noel.

The room, already stifling, became suddenly unbearable. I got up loosening my collar. I felt her eyes upon my back as I went over to the window, lifted the sash, and leant out, drawing in a deep breath of air. When I shut the window and looked back into the room, I saw her watching me fixedly. "What's wrong with you?" she said. "You're nervous, aren't you?"

"No," I answered. "I couldn't breathe, that's all. You keep this room too warm."

"If so, it's partly for your sake," she said. "You always say the château is too cold. Come over here."

I went towards her slowly, against my will. Those eyes of hers, so like my own, surely had intuition of the masquerade. She reached for my hands.

"Don't let's become sentimental," she said, "and trouble ourselves over what Fate sends us. It's too late, for you and for me. Life isn't a short affair, as everybody makes out; it's long, too long. Neither of us is going to die for years. Let us both be comfortable, if we can."

A discreet tap at the door revealed Charlotte and Germaine with our trays, and once again there was the ritual of the meal, now familiar to me. The first evening the comtesse had barely tasted food, but tonight she sopped up her soup with soft pieces of bread, her eyes intent, her chin nearly touching the plate.

The meal over, she said, "Better say good night to me now. I shall be tired directly. All Françoise has to do is to keep her feet up, and she may produce a boy. Kiss me, then." The hands gripped me once again, the eyes held mine. "None of this nonsense about specialists. They cost too much," she said.

Downstairs, Marie-Noël followed me into the salon. "Papa," she whispered, "is Maman ill because I made her unhappy?"

"No," I said, "it's got nothing to do with it."

I sat down and pulled her to me. "What's the matter with you?" I asked. "Why are you so nervous?"

Her eyes flickered away from me. "I don't see why you want this baby," she said at last. "Maman told Aunt Renée a long time ago that she wished she didn't have to have it."

It seemed easiest to tell her the truth as I saw it myself. "It's peculiar," I said, "but your grandfather Bruyère tied up his money in such a way that we can't use any of it unless we have a son. So, even though we are perfectly content with our one daughter, it would make things much easier to have a boy."

The instant look of relief upon her face was as though she had been given a blessed antidote to physical pain.

"Oh," she said, "is that all? Just for money?"

In an excess of emotional release she slipped off my knee and turned a somersault from the sofa on to the floor, dressing-gown and night-gown flying over her head, revealing her small round behind. Shouting with laughter, her head hidden in the bunch of clothes as she bent from the waist, she walked backward across the room as Blanche and Renée and Paul came in.

Blanche said swiftly, "Pull down your dressing-gown at once."

Marie-Noel stood up and smiled. "It's all right, Aunt Blanche," she said. "Papa and Maman are having the baby just for money, not because they want children." She caught my hand with a happy, proprietary air. "You know, Papa," she said, "Aunt Blanche told me that after you were born everyone stopped loving her, nobody took any notice of her any more, and it was one of the lessons in humility that turned her to God. But when my little brother arrives, you will love me as much as ever, and perhaps the Sainte Vierge will teach me a different lesson in humility, not the one she taught Aunt Blanche."

It must have struck her that the frozen faces of her aunts and uncle did not reflect her own happiness. She glanced at me uncertainly, then back again to the sisters-in-law. Of the two women, Renée, if possible, looked the more outraged. The child smiled at her graciously.

"After all," she said, "there are other virtues besides humility. I could learn to have patience, like Aunt Renée. It's not everyone who can grow a baby. She has been married for three years to Uncle Paul, and nothing has happened to her yet."

## CHAPTER 8

IT SEEMED to me that I had reason to bless Françoise: her weakness gave me an excuse for absence upstairs. It was far simpler to sit with her in the bedroom than down below in the salon with Paul and Renée. I went upstairs with Marie-Noel and tucked her in for the night, then I returned to Françoise and did the same for her. I fetched hot water from the bathroom, and a sponge and soap and towel; then toothbrush and powder, pins for her hair, a night-cap that tied with ribbon under the chin. I waited on her like an orderly in the hospital, or someone called urgently to minister first aid. Her gratitude was intense. She kept saying, in wonder and surprise, that I was kind.

"It's nothing," I answered. "What else would you expect?"

"I'm not used to it," she said. "You're not thoughtful as a rule. But perhaps you're avoiding Paul and Renée tonight in case they ask you what you were doing in Villars?"

I wondered, as I kissed her and turned out the light, whether she

realized instinctively that I had disclosed only part of what had happened during the day.

As I went back to the dressing-room, I remembered the letter from the lawyer Talbert, and I took it out of my pocket and read it. The *verrierie*, he said, was running at a steady loss—that at least I already knew—and bankruptcy could only be avoided if it was subsidized from some other source, by the sale of land or securities, for instance. Presumably it was this letter which had made it so vital that Jean should see the Carvalet people and persuade them, if he could, to agree to more favourable terms.

The following day was Saturday, and I decided to go down to the foundry first thing in the morning, before Paul had dressed and had his coffee, to see if there was a letter from Carvalet.

As I crossed the rough ground to the house behind the big foundry shed I met the postman walking away from it, and I knew my instinct to come early had been right. I went swiftly to the office door, and there was Jacques sorting the letters beside the desk. He turned round, looking at me in surprise.

"I thought Carvalet might have written," I said in explanation. "Let's see if there is anything from them."

He looked down at the small pile of letters in his hand, and second from the top was a long envelope with the Carvalet stamped address. I took it from him, and discreetly he moved away while I read the letter. It was all right. It confirmed the telephone conversation and enclosed the contract, extended for a further six months, drawn up on the new terms.

"Jacques," I said, "have you got our old contract there?"

He handed me the contract without a word, and I sat down at the desk and compared the two. Knowing nothing of the business, I could at least seize the salient fact that in the future Carvalet would pay less for the products sent them.

"I want to run through the figures," I said to Jacques. "Wages, production costs, the whole outfit."

He stared. "You saw them recently," he said. "You and Monsieur Paul and I checked everything before you went to Paris."

"I want to do it again," I said.

It took us about an hour and a half. When we had done, and he went through to the kitchen to make some coffee, I was able to compare the final figures he had given me with what they would become under the new contract. The answer was that something in the nature of five million francs would have to be found from the personal account of Jean de Gué to balance costs. My blundering sentiment had cost the owners dear.

I put the new contract in my coat pocket, and went through to the kitchen to find Jacques.

"There, Monsieur le Comte," he said, "a little refreshment after so much work." He handed me a cup of steaming coffee. "I am still marvelling at your success in Paris," he said.

"At least," I said, "no one will be out of work."

He raised his eyebrows. "Were you so concerned about the men?" he asked. "Actually, they would soon have found employment. They've been prepared for a close-down for a long time."

I drank my coffee, disillusioned. Perhaps I had meddled to no purpose after all. Someone knocked on the outer door and, excusing himself, Jacques went back to the office. I looked about me, and saw that I was standing in a fair-sized kitchen that must once have done duty for a family, the door beyond leading through to the rest of the house. Curious, I opened it, and saw a broad stone passage, with other rooms leading off it. I crossed the passage and looked into the rooms. They were empty, unfurnished, paint cracking, dust thick upon the floors. In the farthest one of all, a fine, square room with panelled walls, there were large pieces of furniture stacked against a wall, cases of crockery, chairs piled high one upon the other, the whole giving an appearance of neglect. An old almanac was pinned to the wall, the date 1941, and beside it was a box of books. I bent down and opened one of the books. Inside was written "Maurice Duval."

I heard footsteps coming through from the direction of the kitchen. Jacques stood in the doorway, watching me. He hesitated, then advanced uncertainly to the middle of the room. "Were you looking for something, Monsieur le Comte?"

His manner was diffident, embarrassed. I wondered if I had broken some sort of family etiquette by exploring the house.

"Do you think we ought to make use of these rooms?" I said. "Get someone to live in the house, instead of letting it stand empty? Why don't you live here yourself?"

His discomfort became even plainer, and I could tell from his expression that he thought I was attacking him in some way.

"My wife and I are very content where we are in Lauray," he said. "Besides which . . . ." He broke off, distressed.

"Besides what?" I asked.

"Everybody would think it a little strange," he said. "No one has lived here for so long, and then . . . you must excuse me, Monsieur le Comte, but there are not very happy memories connected with the house. Few people would wish to live here now." Once more he hesitated, and then, seeming to gather courage, went quickly on, his words spilling out as if he were driven by something stronger than respect. "Monsieur le Comte," he said, "had there been fighting in the grounds of the *verrerie*, a battle between soldiers, that is something one accepts. But when the last man to live here, the master of the *verrerie*, Monsieur Duval, is woken from his bed in the middle of the night, and taken downstairs and shot by his own countrymen, and his body thrown into the well, cut to pieces with his own glass, even if it happened a long time ago and is something we all prefer to forget, yet it does not make anybody very anxious to come and live here, where it happened, bringing a wife and a family."

"No," I said slowly. "You are right, of course."

As I made my way slowly back to the château I pondered over the two things I had learned from my morning. First, that through my telephone conversation to Carvalet I had committed the glass foundry to a course which could only bring about its ruin; secondly, that the last, well-loved master of the foundry had been butchered on his own doorstep and his body flung down the well.

Before I reached the village I stopped the car and felt in my pockets for the contract and Jean de Gué's wallet. I took from it his driving licence. The signature was a typically flowing French one; a dozen attempts at copying it were enough to give me confidence. When I took up the contract again and wrote his name with a flourish at the bottom of the page, de Gué himself would have hesitated to denounce







it as a forgery. Then I drove down the hill to the village and on to the château, stopping only to post the contract.

The front door stood wide open and there was commotion in the hall. Gaston, with sleeves rolled up, was edging a heavy sideboard through to the dining-room, assisted by another man. As soon as Gaston saw me, and while I was wondering how, without betraying my ignorance, I could find out what this signified, he gasped at me over his shoulder: "Monsieur Paul has been looking for you all morning, Monsieur le Comte. He says you have given no orders yet."

"Well?" I asked. "What is it he wants to know?"

He looked up at me, puzzled. "It's for tomorrow, Monsieur le Comte," he said. "What we must know is your programme for the day."

"You don't think," I began cautiously, "that for once we might leave the arrangements to Monsieur Paul?"

The man stared at me, astounded. "Why, Monsieur le Comte," he exclaimed, "you have never done such a thing in your life. Ever since Monsieur le Comte your father died, it is you who have organized the Sunday of the *grande chasse*."

The *grande chasse* . . . Then, tomorrow, Sunday, must be the big annual shoot in the district, centring in the domaine of St. Gilles, planned and wholly organized by the seigneur, Jean de Gué.

"I've had a lot on my mind since I came back from Paris," I said, "and, frankly, I've not yet worked out tomorrow's programme. I'll see you later."

He looked baffled, frustrated. "As you say, Monsieur le Comte," he answered, "but time is getting on and there is much to be done. Will you see me at two o'clock?"

"At two o'clock," I said, and to be rid of him I went to the lobby as though to telephone, and waited until I heard him pass through the service door. Then I crossed the hall and went outside. Two o'clock or midnight could make no difference—I should have no programme and no plan. Lecturing on French history had not equipped me for *la chasse*: I did not shoot.

I WALKED swiftly away from the château and into the woods. I had to

put myself out of the range of call and somehow decide upon a course of action. The most obvious one was to feign illness, but Dr. Lebrun would know at once that there was nothing wrong. I wondered if I could make Françoise the excuse, but it was too much out of character. However sick his wife might be, it would not matter to Jean de Gué. I could see no way out of my dilemma except by admitting defeat.

I walked slowly to the statue and stood beside it, looking towards the château. The autumn sky had clouded, and the château looked grey and frigid, encircled by its moat. Although the long windows of the salon were thrown open they were not inviting: only darkness came from within. Cattle cropped the grass by the dovecote, and a few yards away a bonfire smouldered, the smell of charred wet wood coming towards me on a wisp of air.

I was filled increasingly with self-disgust. The sense of power and confidence had seeped away, and my likeness to Jean de Gué was nothing but a clown's covering, a ludicrous mask of paint and powder, already falling away in strips. I had been confident this morning, not an hour ago, coming from the foundry with the contract in my pocket. Now I was deflated, the bubble of conceit exploded.

As if it were a symbol mocking me, Jean de Gué's watch, which I wore on my left wrist, suddenly fell to the ground, smashing the glass. I bent and picked it up. The strap had given—I should have noticed it was worn. Irritated by this new mishap, I walked slowly on until I came to the dovecote. Marie-Noel must have been playing here earlier, for her cardigan lay forgotten on the swing. I stood by the bonfire, the bitter, pungent smoke stinging my eyes, and suddenly I was reminded of the well in front of the master's house at the *verrière*. There were nettles here, too, and tangled grass; and as I looked at them I saw in my mind's eye a man's limp body being thrust down the deep black hole of the well.

Another gust of smoke came to me and I suddenly knew what I was going to do. I walked over and tossed the watch I was holding into the fire. I saw it fall against a heap of glowing embers. Then I knelt down and thrust my hand amongst them until I had the watch. I cried out with the searing agony of pain and collapsed sideways on to the grass, clutching my hand, while the broken watch lay forgotten beside me.



I lay a moment, waiting for the faintness to pass, and then, because of the intensity of the pain, I got to my feet and began to run towards the château. I remember stumbling across the threshold and falling on to the sofa, and seeing the frightened face of Renée, and hearing her cry out; and then the darkness that I sought was with me and about me, but the pain continued.

Renée ran out of the room screaming for Blanche. I heard Paul say he was telephoning for the doctor, and I thought dimly, through the pain, that if only I could faint the pain would stop. Then Blanche was there, kneeling. She reached for my hand and covered it with something cool and cleansing. Then she put a bandage over it and fastened it loosely, and told the others that in a moment or two the pain would ease.

"Is that better?" asked Paul, and I waited a moment and then said, "Yes, I think so." I saw that Marie-Noel had now joined the circle and was staring down at me, her eyes enormous in her small white face.

"Whatever happened?" asked Renée. Beyond her was Gaston, troubled, unhappy, with a glass of brandy that I did not want.

"My watch fell off my wrist into the bonfire," I said. "I didn't want to lose it, so I bent to pick it up and burnt myself instead. My own fault entirely. An idiotic thing to do."

"One thing's evident," said Paul. "You'll be in no shape to shoot tomorrow."

"That's the first thing I thought of," I said.

They stared at me in sympathy. Gaston made a little clicking sound of vexation. "It's what you most enjoy, Monsieur le Comte."

I shrugged my shoulders. "It can't be helped," I said. "And now let's forget it," I said. "I've caused enough commotion for one morning. Why don't you start lunch? It must be after one."

I closed my eyes again and they all went away. Some time later there

was a bell, and in a minute or two the elderly bearded face of Dr. Lebrun was looking at me, pince-nez on the bridge of a large nose, side by side with the impassive Blanche. "They tell me you've been playing the fool with a bonfire," he said. "Well, we all do foolish things now and again. Let's have a look at the damage."

Blanche unwrapped my hand again. Our eyes met, and there was something searching in her expression that made me feel, during one instant of fear, that she knew the truth about this masquerade, and that was why she had relieved me of pain—because she did it to a stranger. The doctor anointed my hand and did it up again, asking Blanche to renew the dressings night and morning. Their ministrations completed, Blanche invited the doctor into the dining-room to have something to eat.

When the family had finished lunch they came flocking back into the room to inquire after me, and I put the second part of my plan into action. "Paul," I said, "you arrange everything for tomorrow. Now I'm out of it I prefer to be out altogether."

"Oh, nonsense," exclaimed Paul. "You'll feel more like it in an hour or so. If I run it you'll only criticize me and say I've wrecked it."

"I won't," I said, "you go ahead. If I can't shoot I'm not interested." I got up from the sofa, telling them that I wanted to rest alone in the library, and I could tell by their faces that they believed my decision came from bitter disappointment, and also because I was still in pain.

I went into the library and, to make the hours pass, pushed a chair over by the desk and pulled out the photograph album once again. I could take my time with it now, and I noticed things that had escaped me in my previous hurried glimpse. Maurice Duval, for instance, appeared quite early in the groups at the *verrerie*. He was standing in a back row, a youngish man, in a group that had the date 1925 beside it; and then, rather like a boy in a school picture, he advanced year by year to a more prominent position, until, towards the end of the album, he was promoted to a chair beside the Comte de Gué himself, looking confident and at ease. I liked his face. It was strong, wise, trustworthy, a face that would surely command affection and respect.

I must have slept in the chair, because suddenly it was six o'clock, and I woke feeling better. At dinner Paul and Renée were both full of

the arrangements for the shoot, the time the guests were to arrive, the names of some of them, the plans for lunch at a farmhouse if it was wet. It was as though, in some fortunate way, my ridiculous action had given them purpose and authority. Paul obviously enjoyed his part of organizer, and Renée, with Françoise out of the way, saw herself, through Paul's promotion, suddenly acting hostess; she kept asking Paul if he had remembered this or forgotten that; and there was something touching about their enthusiasm and their keenness, like understudies cast at a moment's notice into leading roles.

The evening wore on, the newspapers our distraction, and now and again Renée glanced at me and smiled, the smile of sympathy, of collusion—to show me, I suppose, that because of my injury I was now pardoned for my neglect of yesterday. At half past nine I said good night and went upstairs, stopping to see Marie-Noel before retiring. Her room was in darkness, so I fumbled for the switch and turned it on. The child was kneeling at her prie-dieu, clutching a rosary, and I realized I had stumbled upon some meditation.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I'll come back when you've finished."

She turned blank eyes towards me, holding up her hand for silence, and I stood there, uncertain what I was meant to do. But in a moment she crossed herself and laid her rosary at the feet of the Madonna, then stood up and climbed into bed.

"I was doing my Stations of the Cross," she said. "Aunt Blanche always says it helps to do the Stations if one is thinking about something else."

"What were you thinking about?" I asked.

"This morning I was thinking about the shoot and what fun it would be," she said, "which I'm sure was a sin in itself. The rest of the day I've been thinking about you."

Her eyes were more puzzled than concerned. "You needn't worry about me," I said, tucking her in with one hand. "Dr. Lebrun says my hand will be quite all right in a few days. It was a silly thing to happen, the watch falling off—I ought to have remembered that the strap was loose."

"But it didn't fall off," she said.

"What do you mean?"

She stared up at me, turning red, and began picking at the bedclothes in embarrassment. "I was in the dovecote," she said. "I had climbed up to the top, and was looking through that little gap beside the hole where the pigeons go in and out. I saw you come down the path swinging the watch in your hand. I was going to call out to you, but you looked so serious I didn't like to. You went to the bonfire, and threw the watch right in the middle of it. You did it on purpose. Why?"

I sat down on the chair beside the bed. It was easier than standing up. "The watch was really an excuse," I said. "I didn't want to shoot tomorrow, and I couldn't pretend to be ill. People would have realized nothing was the matter. But I burnt my hand more than I meant to. I was a bit muddled in my mind, thinking about someone who had been murdered a long time ago."

She nodded. "You were thinking about Monsieur Duval."

I stared at her, surprised. "As a matter of fact I was."

"Very natural," she said, "since he gave you the watch."

"What do you know about Monsieur Duval?" I asked.

"He was master at the *verrerie*," she said, "and some say he was a patriot and some say he was a traitor. He had a horrid death and I'm forbidden to talk about it. Especially to you and to Aunt Blanche. But tell me, Papa, why don't you want to shoot tomorrow?"

Here was the question, and I did not know how to answer it. "I just don't," I said. "I don't want to shoot."

She considered me gravely. "Is it because you don't want to kill? Because it is suddenly a sin to you to take any life, even a bird's?"

I should have told her instantly no, but instead I hesitated. I could see that she was weaving some fantasy in her mind about her father being sickened suddenly of all slaughter; that he had burnt his hand so that he should not be tempted to kill again.

"Perhaps," I said. As soon as I had spoken I realized my mistake. I had not deliberately lied to her before.

She knelt up in bed, and put her arms round my neck. "I think you've shown great courage," she said. "It's just like the verses in the Gospels: 'Wherefore, if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out . . .'"

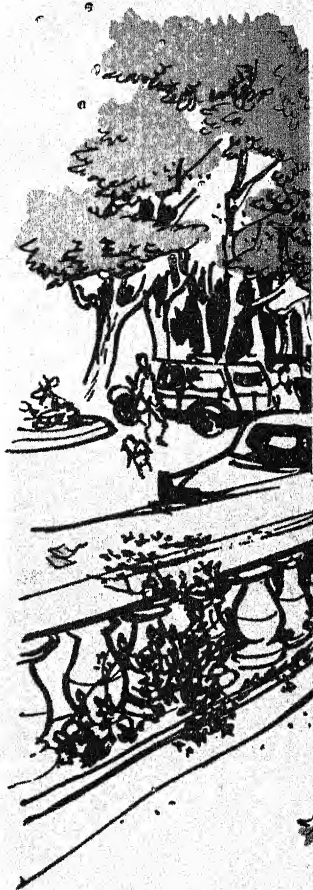
"Listen," I told her, "there's no great mystery about this. I burnt my hand, and there's an end to it. Now forget it."

She smiled, bent down and kissed my bandaged hand. "I promise I won't mention it," she said, "but you can't prevent me from thinking about it. If you see me looking at you tomorrow in a very particular way, it will mean I am thinking of your great act of humiliation. Good night, Papa."

## CHAPTER 9

I SLEPT restlessly for a few hours, and woke to a grey damp morning with a thin drizzle. Instantly the whole day loomed before me—the shoot, the guests, the ritual of the hours to come, as foreign to me as a tribal feast—and it seemed to me desperately important that I should not disgrace the de Gué family or the château of St. Gilles, not because I had any respect for the absent seigneur but because something within me acknowledged tradition.

Despite my efforts, however, the day was a complete fiasco. After early Mass, which, to my surprise, the Comtesse herself attended, the rain increased and by ten it was a downpour. We stood on the terrace as the first cars drove through the gateway. Poor Renée, her innocent plan thwarted, was hidden from view by the massive figure of her mother-in-law, who, leaning on a stick, a great shawl over her shoulders, stood in the place of honour at the entrance to the château, regally offering a word of welcome to each arrival.









I stood apart and my silence was taken for irritation at my accident. My reiteration of "Don't ask me anything—ask Paul" was thought to be mockery of his efforts, and I could see the impression spreading that the day would be a hit-and-miss affair, with nobody in charge and the whole thing slightly ridiculous.

Matters went from bad to worse. César, wildly excited because he had been unleashed, got in a fight with a rival, a well-trained retriever. Later, in the field, he resumed the battle, to the rage of the other dog's owner, a visiting marquis, who stalked off, his face purple with fury. And even when, exhausted and humiliated, I decided to return to the château alone, I lost my way and inadvertently stumbled on a covey of birds. There was a flurry of wings as one bird after another took flight. I then perceived, not twenty yards away, Paul staring at me, while posted down the ride, like sentinels on guard, the line of *chasseurs* waited in ignorance for the birds I had prematurely scattered.

AT THAT moment Gaston appeared from nowhere with the car. He also had a flask of cognac, which I swallowed humped on the back seat of the Renault. Through the misty windscreen I watched the disconsolate figures of the sportsmen, balked of their prey, turn and disappear through the belt of trees in hopeful quest of less elusive quarry. Gaston, devoted, anxious, suggested that Dr. Lebrun should be summoned, but he read my symptoms wrongly. My hand was not hurting me: the cognac was the solace I needed. After a while, the flask emptied, we came to a huge barn, and I barely had time to huddle in the far corner, screened from the open door, before the hunters entered, thirsty, tired and steamy wet, turning the barn to babel until the rafters rang. Servants from the château hastened round with wine.

I was aware of someone touching my elbow. It was Marie-Noël, saying, "Uncle Paul wants to know if you are going to say a few words, or shall he?" Before I could answer, the whole company was banging and stamping, and someone was patting me on the shoulder, saying, "Go on, Jean, make a speech." The brandy had affected me; in a haze of alcohol, surrounded on all sides by a sea of faces, I thought, This is where I make my mark as seigneur of St. Gilles. I may have ruined the sport this morning, but now I am in form.

"*Mesdames et Messieurs*," I began, "once again it is my pleasure to welcome you upon this happy occasion, and although, alas, an accident has prevented me from taking an active part in the proceedings, I am consoled by the fact that my brother has deputized so well. It is not an easy thing to do, to take another's place. The truth of this was forced upon me only yesterday morning when I was down at the *verrière* looking through the accounts." I pulled myself up. What the devil was I saying? "Be that as it may," I floundered, "I am not here to talk about the *verrière* but about shooting. . . ."

In front of me the faces were puzzled, uneasy, and it dawned upon me that it would be best to finish my speech speedily with some jocular remark.

"In conclusion," I said, lifting my glass, "I will only add this—that my damaged hand today surely prevented disaster. The marquis was wise to go home when he did. If I had carried a gun"—and here I paused for emphasis—"some of you present might never have survived." I stopped, oddly relieved to have uttered my own truth, but I could not understand why nobody clapped. However feeble my joke may have seemed to them, surely courtesy demanded at any rate a show of applause? Instead, there was a shuffling of feet, and everybody began to move away and outside as though the barn had suddenly become unbearably warm and they longed for the open air.

Renée was with me again, and Dr. Lebrun. "I think you must have a touch of fever," he said. "It would be wise to get back to the château as soon as possible."

"Nonsense," I said, "my hand isn't hurting at all."

"All the same," he said, "you'd be wiser to lie down."

I was in no condition to argue. I allowed myself to be led to the car, and, as we turned out of the farm-yard, I could see the straggling line of sportsmen moving off to their afternoon objective. It was still raining, and I did not envy them.

"My speech didn't seem to go down very well," I said to the silent Gaston at my side.

He did not answer for a moment. Then the corner of his mouth twitched. "Listen, Monsieur le Comte," he said, his voice an apology, "you had a little too much to drink, that was all."

"Was it so noticeable?" I said.

I felt rather than saw the shrug. "People are sensitive," he said, "especially about the past. It doesn't do to mix up war and peace and make a joke of it. After all, you were a resistance leader talking to a group of well-known collaborators."

"But I didn't do anything of the sort," I said. "I was speaking of something quite different."

"Excuse me, Monsieur le Comte," he said, "I misunderstood you. So did they."

We drove the few miles back in silence, and in silence I went upstairs and crept softly into the dressing-room so as not to disturb Françoise. Throwing myself down on the bed in my clothes, I slept instantly. I was woken by someone whispering in my ear. Opening my eyes I saw that it was Germaine, the little *femme de chambre*.

"Come quickly, Monsieur le Comte," she was saying. "Madame la Comtesse is unwell, she is asking for you."

I got up instantly. "What's the matter with Madame la Comtesse?" I asked, straightening my tie and running a comb through my hair at the mirror.

"I don't know, Monsieur le Comte," she answered, looking frightened. "She started to groan and to ask for Charlotte, but Charlotte had joined some visitors in the kitchen and told me not to go down for her. So I told Madame a lie—I said I could not find Charlotte. Then she asked for you, and she said to come at once, no matter what you were doing. I was frightened, she looked so ill."

She followed me out of the dressing-room and up the stairs. When we came to the bedroom door I asked her to wait outside in the corridor. The room was dark. Only a feeble glow from the stove enabled me to distinguish the shape of the bed, and, because I did not want to disturb the comtesse by turning on the light, I went to the window and eased the shutter so that a streak of pallor might at least make the darkness grey.

Her voice came to me, faint and strangely guttural, from the depths of the vast bed. "I'm ill. Why didn't you come before?"

Her words, "*Je souffre*," do not lend themselves to another language. The distress is there, physical or mental, embraced in the single phrase.

"What do you want me to do?" I asked. I knelt down beside the bed and took her hand.

"You know perfectly what I want you to do," she said.

There were medicines on the table beside the bed, and I glanced towards them, perplexed, but she shook her head, impatient, exasperated, and moaned, thrashing her head from side to side. "Charlotte keeps it next door," she said, "in the dressing-room, in the drawer of the cupboard there. Surely you remember?"

I got up, went into the dressing-room, and switched on the light. There was only one cupboard in the small room, with a single drawer, and this I opened. Inside were two boxes, one of them still half wrapped, the gift which I had given into Charlotte's hands that first evening in the château. I took the wrapping off now, and opened the box. It was full of little ampoules packed one upon the other in layers of cotton wool. They contained liquid, and a label upon each, with the single word "morphine." I opened the other box. It held a hypodermic syringe. As I stood there, staring, I heard her calling me from the bedroom, "Jean, why don't you come?" Slowly I took the syringe out of its box, and one of the ampoules, and laid them on the table below. There was cotton wool there, and a bottle containing medical alcohol. I understood at last what it was that Jean de Gué had brought his mother from Paris. But his mother was not ill or dying, neither was she in pain.

I went back into the bedroom and turned on a light. The woman lying there was not the one who had stood on the terrace that morning, regal and commanding, but another, grey and old and frightened, her hands restless, her eyes staring. She kept turning her head from side to side on the pillow in a movement that was horrible, inhuman, like something long imprisoned without food, light or water.

"What are you waiting for?" she said. "Why are you so long?"

I knelt beside her. My burn did not matter any more, and I put both my hands behind her, and turned her head towards me so that she was forced to look at me and be still.

"I don't want to give it to you," I said.

"Why?" She spoke in anguish, and she pulled herself up in bed and held my shoulders. The mask became a face, and the face hers and mine and Marie-Noël's together, looking out at me from her eyes, and the

voice was no longer deep and guttural but the voice of the child when she spoke to me the first evening and asked, "Papa, why did you not come and say good night to me?"

I got up and went into the bathroom. Breaking the neck of the ampoule, I filled the syringe, and came back and prepared her arm with the alcohol as I remembered we had done during the war. Then I drove the needle into her arm, pressed the plunger and waited, and she leant back on her pillows and waited too. Her eyelids flickered, and for a moment, before closing them, she looked at me and smiled. I took the syringe back to the dressing-room, washed it and replaced it in the box. However much I tried to tell myself that what had happened in this room was compassionate and merciful, it was not true. I knew that I had done what the son and the mother had done before me—I had taken the easiest way out.

I went into the corridor and found Germaine still standing there, waiting. I said to her, "It's all right now, Madame la Comtesse is sleeping. I've left the light on. She won't notice it. You had better sit by the stove until Charlotte comes up."

It must have been a little before eight the next morning when I first heard the hurrying footsteps along the corridor, the knocking on Françoise's door, and the confused babble of voices, exclamations, cries.

Then came the voice of Françoise herself, urgent, shrill, "Jean, Jean, are you awake?"

I leapt from my bed and opened the door to her room. She was standing there in her nightgown, wan and pale, and behind her Germaine, and beyond, Paul, Renée and the gaunt, accusing figure of Blanche, watching me without a word.

I put out my hand to steady Françoise. "It's Maman, isn't it?"

Her eyes swept me, incredulous. "Maman?" she said. "Of course not. It's the child. She's disappeared. Germaine has just been to call her, and her bed hasn't been slept in."

Their faces were turned to mine; decisions, plans, must come from me. Françoise, shivering without a wrapper, was my first concern. "Get back into bed," I said, "we'll soon find her. You can't do anything about it."

Blanche led her, crying, protesting, back to bed, and the rest of us moved out into the corridor.

"She's probably in the park, or in the woods," I said to the others. "Let's not become hysterical. Germaine, go and tell Gaston to start searching the grounds. Tell him to get hold of anyone else who's about. Monsieur Paul and I will be down directly."

"If you want to know what I think," said Paul, "it's this. The child has run away because Jean made an exhibition of himself in public yesterday. She was ashamed. So were we all."

"Marie-Noel was not ashamed," said Renée. "I heard her telling everyone that Jean was the most courageous man in the world and nobody but herself knew why."

Paul shrugged. "In any case, we had better get dressed," he said. "Jean and I will search the grounds with Gaston. That is," he added, throwing me a glance, "if you're sufficiently recovered."

They left; and as I turned back into the room, I stepped on a piece of paper that must have been thrust beneath the door. It was pink, with a sprig of flowers in one corner. It said, in round, unformed letters, "My Papa, the Sainte Vierge tells me you are suffering for the wrong you did in the past, so I am going to pray that all your sins may be visited upon me, who, being young and strong, can bear them better. Sleep well, and have faith in Marie-Noel, who loves you dearly."

I put the paper in my pocket and, crossing quickly to the window, looked down into the moat. There was nothing in it but the tangled grass, the ivy and the weeds. It was only in my tortured imagination that I saw the small body in the blue dress lying in the ditch, broken and useless. It was as I stood there that Gaston came in to tell me that César the dog was also missing. This news brought an odd sense of relief. A child bent on self-destruction would not take a dog with her.

I dressed hurriedly. Once outside the château, Paul and the men and I divided between us the ground to be searched, and my territory took me towards the scene of yesterday's shoot. The woods were soggy with the rain, the fallen leaves like paper under my feet. I knew, tramping the long rides, climbing the ditches in the black woods, that she would not be there, in front of me, a small Artemis with her hound at the end of the ride, or a babe in the woods asleep at the foot of a tree. If the

child wanted to be found she would be found, waiting, hidden, before her own symbolic shrine.

When I broke finally from the forest and emerged into fields once more, I saw that my walk had brought me in a half circle, and there, a couple of fields away, were the four dry sheds. I climbed under the wire surrounding the wood, crossed the fields, and, opening a small gate, came to the apple orchard and the deserted master's house. There was a half-open window beside the blistered door, a window that on my visit only three days before had been fast shut and crusted with the years.

Someone came to the window and looked out at me, and I walked over. It was Julie, and she had her finger to her lips for silence. "You came quickly," she whispered. "I only sent word to the château ten minutes ago. I could get no reply by telephone."

Her words had no meaning for me. Yet I was afraid. The intuition that I had learned never to mistrust turned to apprehension. "I had no message," I said. "I came by chance."

I climbed through the window into the room. It was the same that I had entered before, the one-time salon of the master's house. A shaft of sunlight fell upon the child, white and still under a heap of blankets, and upon the dog, his muzzle between his paws, stretched at her feet. It was what my fancy had conjured, yet, strangely, more poignant still.

"One of the workmen, Ernest, found her because of César," said Julie. "He was standing guard beside the old well. She must have climbed down the ladder and lain there, amongst the glass and rubble, all the night. She was asleep when he brought her up."

Asleep. I had thought her dead. The small face against the dark blanket looked like something carved from stone, an angel's head in a cold cloister.

"Poor little one," said Julie, "it is always at this age they take fancies into their heads. For myself, it was a boy in the village. I followed him everywhere. My sister had a passion for her teacher. This one is religious, like Mademoiselle Blanche. It will pass."

She patted the blanket, her hand brown and strong and wrinkled like her face. I wished I possessed her common sense, her tenderness, her perception. "It's odd," I said to her. "When they told me she had disappeared, my first thought was that she had drowned."

"Drowned?" she said, puzzled. "There is nowhere here to drown. There has been no water in the well for fifteen years."

I said, feeling suddenly that I could keep the truth to myself no longer, "I didn't know. I don't know anything. I'm a stranger here."

Surely she must understand? Her honesty would not be fooled: she must recognize me for what I was, an intruder and a fraud.

"Monsieur le Comte was always a stranger at the *verrerie*," she said. She patted my shoulder. "That was the trouble, wasn't it? You allowed another man to take your place and bear your responsibilities. And now you're nearly forty, and it's too late to change. You can't bring back your young days any more than you can bring back poor Monsieur Duval, whose only crime was trying to preserve the *verrerie* while you were absent, for which you and your little group of patriots called him a collaborator, and shot him and let him die there in the well."

She looked at me with pity, and I realized that her words were neither accusation nor condemnation. She knew, the whole countryside knew that Jean de Gué had killed Maurice Duval. Only I had not been sure.

"Julie," I said, "did you like Maurice Duval?"

Her hand was still on my shoulder. "We all liked him," she said. "No one could help it. He had all the qualities you lacked. That was why Monsieur le Comte your father made him master of the *verrerie*. I'm sorry, Monsieur Jean, but it's true."

I could hear footsteps. Julie turned her head. "They got my message," she said. "Someone has come from the château. Carry the child back to bed, and she may never know she walked in her sleep."

"She didn't walk in her sleep," I said. "She came deliberately." My lie about my burnt hand, my behaviour at the shoot had combined to make her think her father penitent about Duval. She had atoned for his deed in her own way, by acting the part of the victim. Only by doing this could she bring him absolution.

Someone appeared at the door. It was Blanche.

"Mademoiselle?" exclaimed Julie, and the astonishment in her voice, the swift glance back to me and to the furniture stored against the walls betrayed some sudden emotion that she had not shown hitherto.

Blanche said nothing. She went straight to Marie-Noël and knelt beside her.



"Where did you find her?" she asked, her voice so low I could hardly hear the words.

"It was Ernest who discovered her, Mademoiselle," Julie said, "here, inside the house. Didn't he tell you?"

"He told me inside a shed," she answered, "but the sheds are always locked at night. And, from her clothes, she has been lying amongst broken glass and lime."

Inside the house or inside the shed, both were lies. Why did Ernest and Julie lie to Blanche? Julie had not lied to me.

"Her pockets are full of glass," said Blanche. "Did you know that?" Feeling in the child's coat pocket, she drew out a handful of minuscule objects: a jug no larger than a thumbnail, a vase, a *flacon*, all miniature yet perfectly formed, and amongst them a diminutive replica of the château of St. Gilles, two towers smashed. "These have not been made since before the war," said Blanche. "I ought to know, since I helped to design them."

For the first time she looked about the room, at the tables and chairs stored there, untouched and unused. And suddenly, in a flash of comprehension, I realized that what she was looking at had once been part of her life. This dusty salon in the master's house was to have been a place possessed by two people who loved each other well. But something had gone amiss, sorrow had turned inward, creation ceased; the Cross she knelt before in her bedroom was not a Saviour but her own hope crucified.

"The little one has blood on her hands," said Julie suddenly. "I did not notice it when I covered her with the blankets."

Together Blanche and I knelt beside the child. Taking the small clenched fists, Blanche opened one hand and I the other. In the hollow of each palm was the red weal of a recent cut, dry, not bleeding. The hands were clean—there was no dust, no glass. Slowly, Blanche raised her eyes.

"Julie," she said, "phone Monsieur le Curé and ask him to come here at once. Then get me the Sacré-Coeur convent at Lauray."

"No," I said. "No. Are you mad? Don't you realize she did it on purpose, for me, because I burnt my hand in the fire?"

Julie, distressed, looked from Blanche to me. "There is no need for

Monsieur le Cûré," she said. "The child has only cut herself with glass. The bottom of the well is full of old glass."

"The well?" said Blanche. "She climbed into the well?"

Julie realized her mistake too late. "Why, yes, Mademoiselle," she said reluctantly. "But what if she did? What if she walked here to the *verrerie*, asleep or awake, because she has too much imagination? Does it make any difference to what is past and gone? Why doesn't someone in the château look after her properly, and love her for herself?"

Blanche turned white. Emotion, long controlled, fought for release. "How dare you?" she said, her voice outraged. "I've watched over the child since she was born. I've loved her, trained her as if she were my own, because her mother is a fool and her father a devil. I won't let her suffer in this world as I have suffered. She was made for another world, another life."

The Blanche who had come into the master's house so full of memories, looking for the lost child, was now another woman, fanatical, bitter, seeking a victim in the one she wished to save.

"If the Seigneur wants to call the child to Himself, Mademoiselle," said Julie, "He will do so in His own good time, and not because Monsieur le Comte killed the man you loved. The little one will suffer in this world only because of what you do to her; yes, you, and her father, and her grandmother, and everybody up at the château. You are used up, spent, good for nothing, the whole lot of you. Now, look . . . you have woken her."

Yet it was Julie herself whose voice, loud and indignant, had caused César to bark and the bark to startle the child. Marie-Noel, her eyes suddenly open and alive with curiosity, sat up, instantly alert, staring at each one of us in turn.

"I've had the most atrocious dream," she said.

Blanche bent over her at once, her arms round her. "It's all right, my *chérie*," she said. "You're safe. It will never happen again, the horror of the well."

Marie-Noel looked at her calmly. "It was not horrible," she replied. "Germaine said it was haunted, but I never saw a ghost. The *verrerie* is a happy place. It's the château that is full of ghosts." César, reassured by the sound of her voice, settled himself at her feet. Marie-Noel patted

his head. "He's hungry, and so am I. Can we go across to the cottage with Julie and get some bread?"

The telephone started ringing from the office, and the child looked troubled.

"I hope that's not the beginning of it," she said.

"The beginning of what?" I asked.

"The beginning of my ferocious dream," she said. She stood up and put her hand in mine. "The Sainte Vierge is anxious about all of us," she said. "She told me Gran'mie wanted Maman to die, and I wanted her to die too. So did you. We were all guilty. It was very wicked. Isn't there something you can do to prevent it coming true?"

Jacques must have arrived at the office, for the ringing ceased, and through the open door I heard his low voice speaking. After a moment he appeared at the kitchen door and beckoned. I went to him. "You had better go back at once to the château," he whispered. "There has been an accident. Do not take the child. . . ."

This time intuition had not lied. I looked over my shoulder to the inner room. Marie-Noel was kneeling, taking the small glass *flacons* out of her pocket, and arranging them upon the dusty floor, the château at the head. She caught sight of her hands, and turning them, palms outward, called to Blanche, "I must have cut myself. I don't remember how. Will the cuts fade and leave no mark, or will you have to bandage me as you did Papa?"

AT THE château we were met by Charlotte, blabbing and hysterical, the woman who milked the cows screaming in my ear, and the cook, whom I had not seen before but whom I knew to be Gaston's wife. She came from the kitchen premises, eyes startled, hair unpinned and loose, and said, "They brought the ambulance from Villars. I did not know where else to telephone."

The crooked finger of the woman who milked the cows stabbed at a patch of trampled grass as she repeated again and again, "I saw her fall. . . . I saw her fall. . . ." The jabbing finger, the eyes upturned to the gaping bedroom window, the sudden sweeping gesture of her hand as she mimed the falling body were terrible and vivid, the drama of a witch, and Charlotte, plucking at Blanche's sleeve and babbling, "She



was still breathing, Mademoiselle, I put a mirror to her lips," became her partner in the dreadful play.

A nightmare ride began: out of the drive, up the avenue and on to the road to Villars, in the wake of the ambulance that could only have preceded us by some twenty-five minutes. When we got to the hospital it was Blanche who entered first, Blanche who spoke rapidly to someone white-coated, young, standing in the passage, and Blanche who pushed me into the bare impersonal waiting-room while she disappeared after him. The sister who returned with her was calm, impassive, trained like all her colleagues the world over to meet emotion.,

"I can't tell you the extent of the injuries. The doctor is examining her now," she said to me as she led us from the waiting-room to a smaller private one. I stared at a map of the region framed on the wall, and I saw that Villars was twenty kilometres from Mortagne, and from Mortagne, a by-road led direct to the Abbey of la Grande-Trappe. On the desk was a calendar. A week ago tomorrow I had been driving to Le Mans. . . . A week ago. . . . Everything I had said, everything I had

done had brought this family closer to disaster and to pain. Mine was the responsibility, mine the guilt. Jean de Gué, laughing before the mirror in that hotel bedroom, had left me to solve his problems as I chose. My own folly, ignorance, bluff and blind conceit had brought about the moment that was passing now.

"Monsieur le Comte?" The man who entered, big, burly, would surely have given confidence to a waiting relative, but I had seen too many doctors' expressions in the war not to recognize finality. "I am Dr. Moutier. I want to tell you that everything possible is being done. The injuries are extensive, and it would be wrong of me to express any great hope. The comtesse is, of course, unconscious. I understand neither of you was present when the accident occurred."

Blanche was the spokesman. "The windows are large," she said. "She had been unwell. She must have gone to the window feeling faint and opened it too wide, and leaning out . . . ."

"Naturally, naturally," the doctor said mechanically. "Excuse me." He turned from us to speak to the sister outside the door. The low, rapid conversation was inaudible to us inside the room, but I thought I caught the words "transfusion" and "Le Mans," and I could see from Blanche's face that she had heard them too.

"They are going to give a transfusion," she said. "I heard him say they were sending the blood from Le Mans." I wondered if she realized that these were the first words she had spoken to her brother for fifteen years. They came too late. He was not there to hear them.

The doctor turned to us again, and Blanche caught at his sleeve. "Forgive me, Doctor. I could not help overhearing something of what you said to the sister. You have sent to Le Mans for blood: wouldn't it save time if my brother gave his blood instead? Both he and my brother Paul belong to blood group O, which I understand can be given to anyone without danger."

For a moment the doctor hesitated, glancing at me. Appalled at what might happen, at the inevitable worsening of disaster, I said swiftly, "I'm not group O. I only wish to God I were."

Blanche looked at me, dumbfounded. "That's not true. You are both universal donors, you and Paul. I remember Paul telling me only a few months ago."

I shook my head. "No," I said, "you're mistaken. Paul, perhaps, not me. I belong to group A. It wouldn't be any use."

The doctor gestured. "Please don't distress yourselves. It is preferable to use blood straight from the laboratory. There will be very little delay. Everything is on its way already."

He paused, looking curiously from me to Blanche, and went out of the room.

For a few moments Blanche said nothing. Then oddly, terribly, it seemed to me, her expression of concern and anguish changed. She knows, I thought, she knows at last. I've given myself away. But I was wrong. Slowly, as though she could not believe her own words, she said, "You don't want to save her. You're hoping she will die."

I stared at her, aghast. She turned and went back to the window. There was nothing I could say, nothing I could do.

At one o'clock Paul and Renée arrived. I met them at the hospital entrance and pointed to the room where Blanche was waiting. I did not want to talk to them. Renée went straight in, but Paul, after a second's hesitation, came to me. "How is she?" he asked.

I shook my head, and went out of the hospital into the street. I began walking without thought, without intention; yet half consciously, I suppose, I knew where I must go. I found myself before the closed door of Béla's shop, "L'Antiquaire du Pont." The glass was shuttered and there was a notice in the window saying, "*Fermé le lundi.*" I stood looking up at the balcony and the windows of the house, but they were closed too. I walked slowly back to the hospital. Paul was standing by the entrance. He said, "We've been looking for you."

I knew then it had happened. He took my arm, an odd, half-protective gesture, and we walked along together to the small room. Dr. Moutier was there, with Blanche and Renée and the sister, who had received us. He said, "It's all over. I'm so very sorry."

They were all looking at me except Blanche, who turned away, and when I did not answer immediately Dr. Moutier added, "She never recovered consciousness. She was in no pain. I can assure you of that."

The sister said, "You would like to see her," her words a plain statement of fact, not an interrogation, and she led me down the passage and into a small room. We stood together beside the bed, looking down

on Françoise de Gué. There was no sign of injury. She might have been sleeping. She did not look like a person dead.

The sister said, "I always think the real personality appears on the face during the first hour after death. Sometimes it is a consolation to believe this."

I was not sure. The Françoise lying dead looked peaceful, younger, happier, than the Françoise of that morning, who had been haggard, anxious, querulous. If this, the dead one, was true and the other false, then living had accomplished nothing: it had been a waste of time.

Paul said to me, "You had better get home to St. Gilles. I've telephoned to Gaston to bring the Citroën. Blanche and I will stay here to make arrangements, and Gaston can drive you and Renée in the Renault."

Mistakenly, the bereaved are left alone to indulge grief. It would have been better to give me something to do. Instead I watched, silent, ineffectual.

When Gaston came I sensed relief. They wanted me out of the way. Renée silently pushed me into the front seat, herself got into the back, and we drove away.

Gaston's face was shocked and drawn. He had not said anything, but silently, gently, he had put a rug over my knees, a strange, touching gesture of sympathy for sorrow.

The closed shutters of the château were the first sign of mourning, and I supposed that Gaston had given orders for this to be done. Gaston had also ordered a meal to be laid in the dining-room, for none of us had touched any food. More to satisfy him, I think, than ourselves, we sat down and ate mechanically. It was strange, I thought, how sudden death, like war, brings instant sympathy. The challenging, sensual Renée of the past week was now natural, kindly, anxious about the child—ready to do anything to make the sudden loss less appalling for Marie-Noël.

"I don't think she will be frightened," I said. "I think—I can't explain why—she was prepared."

After a while I called Gaston and asked him to go to the *verrière* with a message for Julie. Would he, I said, tell her that Françoise was dead, and that I wanted Julie to break the news to Marie-Noël?

"Monsieur le Curé is upstairs with Madame la Comtesse," he said to me, after a moment's hesitation. "Does Monsieur le Comte wish to see him now, or presently?"

"I'll see Monsieur le Curé directly," I said.

I went upstairs to Françoise's bedroom. Someone had closed the shutters and window here as elsewhere; I opened them. The base of the window came to my hip. It was possible to sit on the sill, lean out, and lean too far. Possible, but not probable. Yet it had happened. . . . I closed the window and the shutters once again. I looked round the bedroom that gave no clue to what had passed, no hint of tragedy, and then went out and shut the door behind me. I walked along the corridor, up the stairs, through the door to the other corridor, and so to the room in the tower at the far end.

## CHAPTER 10

I DID NOT knock. I opened the door and went straight in. The room was shuttered, the window closed, even the curtains were drawn too. The dogs had been banished elsewhere, and the only sound was the low murmur of the curé, praying, and the echoing response from the opposite chair. Both had their rosaries in their hands; the curé was kneeling, head bowed, the mother sat huddled in her chair, shoulders hunched, chin touching her chest.

When the last Glória was said, and the last Amen, the gentle old curé with his baby face and his nodding head rose and came to me, taking my hand.

"My son," he said, "we have been praying so hard for you, and we have asked that you may be given courage and support in this terrible moment of affliction."

I thanked him, and he continued standing, holding my hand and patting it, his face troubled for my sake, yet serene. "You know," he said, "that now, tomorrow and always I am at your disposal, ready to do all in my power for you, and Madame la Comtesse, and the child, and everyone at the château."

He blessed us both, took his books and left the room. We were alone. I said nothing. Nor did she. I did not look at her. Then suddenly,



on impulse, I crossed to the window and pulled back the heavy curtains. I opened the windows wide and the shutters too, and air came into the room, and light.

"What are you doing? Are you trying to blind me?" she said, and she moved forward in her chair, trying to escape the light.

"What happened?" I asked.

"Happened?" She repeated the question after me, raising her head and staring. "How do I know what happened, imprisoned here as I am, useless, nobody even answering a bell? I thought you had come to tell me what happened, not I you."

I knelt on one knee beside her chair, my hand on the arm of it. Her face was a mask. "What did you say to Françoise?" I asked.

Nothing happened, except that she sat more still.

"When?" she asked. "I had not seen her for several days."

"You're lying," I said. "You saw her this morning."

My reply was sudden. She did not expect it. I saw her whole body stiffen in her chair.

"Who says so?" she demanded. "Who's been talking?"

"I say so," I answered, "and nobody's been talking." Purposely I kept my voice low. There was no accusation in it. "I want to know how and why she died," I said.

She gestured. "What's the use? She became giddy and fell. Berthe saw her, didn't she, as she was crossing into the park with the cows? Weren't you told the same story?"

"Yes," I said, "I was told the same story. I don't believe it, that's all."

"What do you believe?"

I stared at the face that told me nothing. "I believe she killed herself," I said, "and so do you."

I expected a denial, or an outburst—or possibly a crumpling and a plea for sympathy. Instead, unbelievably, she shrugged, and then she smiled and said without emotion, "And if she did . . . ."

This answer, cold, inhuman, was a confirmation of all I had most feared. Whatever the reason—jealousy, possessiveness, malice, greed—the mother had wanted Françoise out of the way, and had believed that her son had wanted it too. Death, or the birth of an heir—either meant

release from poverty; and Jean's mother felt only relief that matters were now resolved.

She leant forward in her chair and took my face between her hands.

"It's too late to develop a conscience," she said. "If you thought that Françoise would survive the birth of the child, what made you gamble on her death?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"The day after you returned from Paris you telephoned Carvalet," she said. "Charlotte told me—she listened on the extension in Blanche's room—and when I heard of your nonsensical agreement to their demands, I knew at once that it was a gamble. You were counting on the fortune that might come. Otherwise you'd ruin yourself."

The pattern of events was plain and could not be denied. My motives, misconstrued and twisted, were unimportant now.

"Françoise knew about the contract," I said. "I didn't keep it from her. I told her the truth."

"The truth?" The eyes that looked into mine were cynical and hard. "We all of us tell the truth when it happens to suit us," she said. "Françoise told me the truth this morning, when she came in here. Oh yes, you're right. I did see her. I was probably the last to do so. She came up here dressed, ready to search for the child. 'What upset Marie-Noël?' she asked. 'What upset her?' I answered. 'She's afraid of being supplanted, that's all. She wants you out of the way, and the baby too.' That started it. She told me she'd never been happy here, she'd always been homesick, lonely, lost, and it was my fault, because I'd been against her from the start. 'Jean was never in love with me,' she said. I agreed. 'Even now he only wants the money,' she went on. 'Naturally,' I replied. 'Does he want me to die so that he can marry someone else?' she asked at last. I told her I did not know. 'Jean makes love to everyone,' I said. 'He has made love to Renée, even, here in the château, and he has a mistress in Villars.' She told me she had suspected both these things, and that your kindness to her, the last few days, had been a blind, to make her believe otherwise. She said, 'The child, Jean, all of you want me out of the way.' I told her to stop being hysterical, and to take herself downstairs. That was all. Nothing more was said. She asked for the truth and got it. If she was not brave enough to face up

to it, that was her affair not mine. Whether she threw herself out of the window or fell because she was giddy is beside the point, and something we can't ever prove. The result is the same. You've got what you wanted, haven't you?"

"No," I shouted, "no. . . ."

I pushed her back in the chair, and her expression changed. She looked bewildered, frightened, and the sudden switch from cynicism to apprehension at the sound of my voice, roused in anger, made me realize the hopelessness of trying to make her understand. Whatever she had said to Françoise had been said for her son's sake. I could not accuse her.

I got up and went to the window, and stood there staring out. Dear God, I thought, there must be an answer to this, there must be a way out—not for me, the impostor, but for the mother, for the child, for Blanche and Paul and Renée. If Jean de Gué had fostered jealousy, dissension, animosity, he had the excuse of the past. I had no such pretext. I turned from the window, and looked back at the woman in the chair. I said, "You've got to help me."

"Help you? How?" she asked. "How can I help you?"

I knelt beside her and took her hand. "You told me just now that I had got what I wanted," I said. "Did you mean the money?"

"What else?" she asked. "You'll be a rich man, and you'll be free. That's all that matters to you, isn't it?"

"No," I said, "you matter to me. I want you to be the head of my house, as you used to be. And you can't as long as you take morphine."

Something fell apart, the layer upon layer of defence protecting every individual from assault crumbled for one brief moment as I spoke, and I felt, in the hand that tightened on mine, the loneliness of years, the numbed senses, the mocking mind, the empty heart. Then she withdrew her hand from mine, the armour folded about her once again. She became a person who had chosen a way of life because there was no alternative, with only one solace, one method of oblivion.

"I'm tired and old and useless," she said. "Why should you grudge me something that makes me forget?"

"You're not tired or old or useless," I said. "To yourself, perhaps, but not to me. Yesterday you came downstairs and stood on the terrace,

receiving the guests, as you stood beside my father long ago. You proved that you were not dependent on the box of ampoules in there, and the syringe, and Charlotte. You could defeat them, and you did. You would have gone on defeating them but for me."

She looked up at me, watchful, guarded. "What do you mean?"

"What did you think about," I asked, "yesterday morning, after the guests had gone?"

"I thought about you," she said, "about the past. What does it matter what I thought? I began to suffer, that's all. When I suffer I have to have morphine."

"I made you suffer," I said. "I was the cause."

"What if you were?" she said. "All mothers suffer for their sons. It's part of our life. We don't blame you for it."

"It's not part of a son's life," I said. "They can't stand pain. I'm a coward and always have been. That's why I want your help, now and in the future, much more so than in the past."

I rose from my knees and went into the dressing-room next door. The box of ampoules was still in the cupboard, and the syringe, and I brought them into the bedroom and showed them to her.

"I'm going to take them away," I said. "Perhaps it's dangerous to do so—I don't know. You told me I gambled on winning a fortune when I made that new contract with Carvalet. This is another gamble, a different kind."

I saw her hands tighten on the chair, and for a moment a look of terror, of despair, came into her eyes.

"I can't do it, Jean," she said. "You don't understand. I'm too old, too tired. If you wanted me to stop, why didn't you tell me so before? It's too late."

"It's not too late." I put the box down on the table. "Give me your hands," I said.

She put her hands on mine and I pulled her up from the chair. As she stood beside me she steadied herself, tightly clutching my bandaged hand, and I felt the pain shoot from my fingers to my elbow. She went on holding me, not realizing, and I knew that if I took my hand away something would be lost to her, some confidence, some strength.

"Now come downstairs," I said.

She stood between me and the window, massive, huge, blocking the light, trembling a moment as she gained her balance, her ebony crucifix swinging against her breast like a pendulum. "Downstairs?" she repeated. "What for?"

"Because I need you," I said, "and in the future you'll come down every day."

For a long time she held on to me, never once relaxing her grip upon my hand. Then she released me and moved slowly to the door, majestic, dignified. She did not take my arm in the corridor but went forward, ahead of me, and opened the door of another room. At once the terriers rushed at her, barking, leaping to lick her hands.

She turned to me, exultant. "Just as I thought," she said. "These dogs are not taken out. Charlotte lies to me. Charlotte is supposed to take them in the park every afternoon. The trouble is there is no supervision in the château, no sort of order."

The dogs, released, ran to the stairs, and we followed them. She said, "There hasn't been a funeral in the château since your father died. It must be done properly, for Françoise was a person of importance. After all, she was your wife. She was the Comtesse de Gué."

She waited at the head of the stairs while I put the boxes in the dressing-room. As we entered the salon we heard voices. The others had returned. Paul was standing by the fire-place, the curé beside him. Renée was in her usual place on the sofa, Blanche on another chair. They stared at us, disconcerted, and even the curé, startled, took a moment to recover before he came forward, solicitous, anxious to assist. But she waved him aside and went straight to the chair beside the fire, the chair where Françoise always sat. Blanche rose at once and went to her.

"You ought to be in bed," she said. "Charlotte told me you were very shaken, very exhausted."

"Charlotte's a liar," was the answer, "and you can mind your own business." She fumbled on her dress for the pair of spectacles that were hanging from a chain round her neck beside the crucifix, and put them on and looked at each one of us in turn. "This is a house of mourning," she said, "not a nursing-home. My daughter-in-law has died. I intend to see that everything is done to honour her that should be done. Paul,

get me a pencil and some sheets of paper. Blanche, in the desk in my room, in the top drawer, you will find a dossier containing all the names of the people who came to your father's funeral. Most of them are dead, but they have relatives. Renée, fetch me the telephone directory from the cloakroom. Monsieur le Curé, I should be obliged if you would come and sit beside me; I may have to refer to you for matters concerning the actual burial itself. Jean"—she looked up at me, and paused—"I don't expect any help from you for the moment. You had better take a walk, the air will do you good. You can exercise the dogs, as Charlotte failed to do so. But before you go," she added, "change into a dark suit. The Comte de Gué does not stroll about in a sports jacket when he has lost his wife."

I LEFT them in the salon, and went upstairs and changed. Then I called for Gaston and asked him to take me to the *verrerie* to fetch the child.

As we drove out of the village and up the hill towards the forest Gaston said, "My wife and I, Monsieur le Comte, and indeed everyone in the château, wish to express our deepest sympathy to you in this moment of stress."

"Thank you, Gaston," I said.

"If there is anything any of us can do, you have only to say so, Monsieur le Comte."

I thanked him again. There was nothing anybody could do to ease things, except myself; and I had started off by depriving an addict of morphine, which might lead to a tragedy worse than the first. I did not know. All I knew was that I had become a gambler, like Jean de Gué.

I got out of the car and went into the deserted grounds. Julie was not in her lodge. I told Gaston to wait, and walked to the master's house, but the door was locked. And then I saw Marie-Noel, coming towards me.

Suddenly I did not know what to say to her. I stood awkwardly, looking down at her. Surely, I thought, there must be something that a father does or says at a time of tragedy like this?

"I couldn't fetch you before . . ." I began, but she did not wait for me to finish. She took my hand and said, "I'm glad you didn't. I have

been playing with Madame Yves' nephew, Pierre. Come and see what we've been making." She led me over to a mound of rubble beside a heap of waste glass. "There is the château," she said, pointing to a small glass model, "and these other pieces are the houses in St. Gilles. That big block is the church, and this line of pebbles is the river. We've been playing this all afternoon."

Julie couldn't have told her, then. She didn't know.

"Do you know," she said, and she lowered her voice, "it's very sad, but Pierre's mother doesn't live with them any more. She ran away to Le Mans some weeks ago, and Madame Yves goes in and cooks for Pierre and his father. It's such a shocking thing, for a boy to be without his mother and a husband without his wife."

I hadn't given Julie enough time. That had been it. Gaston had brought the message less than an hour ago. She had not yet found the right moment to break the news. But I was wrong.

"Our situation is very similar," she said, "except that we shall have the consolation of knowing that Maman is well cared for, in Paradise." She stood up, brushing the sand from her knees. "When I heard that Maman had been taken to the hospital, I knew what would happen," she went on. "My dreams have a habit of coming true. But at least this was an accident. In my dream we were trying to kill her on purpose. How did Maman come to fall from the window?"

"I don't know," I said. "Nobody knows."

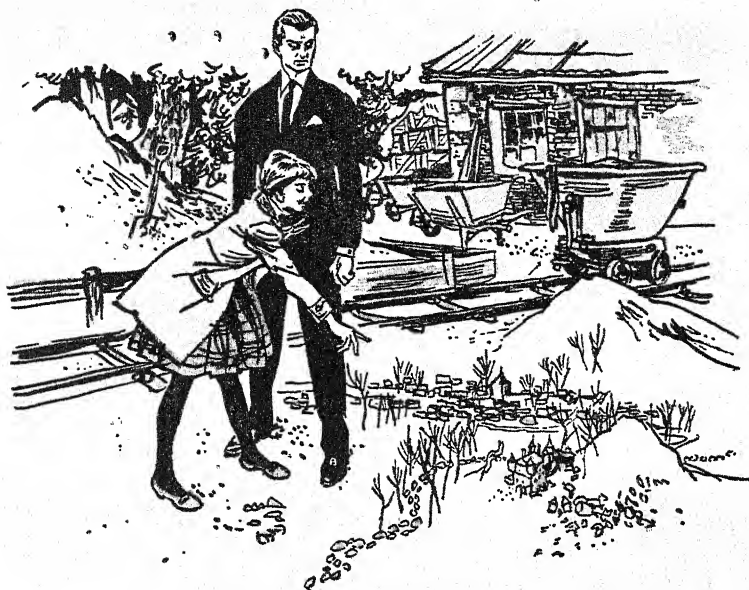
"I shall find out," she said. "It will console Maman in Paradise if we know."

Then she picked up the glass château and, holding it under her arm, ran off to say good-bye to Pierre. I walked over to the lodge. Julie was waiting for me. "She has been very courageous," she said softly. "You can be proud of her."

"It's happened too suddenly," I said. "She hasn't felt it yet."

Julie looked at me with pity. "Do you know so little about children, Monsieur Jean," she asked, "that you imagine, because they don't cry, therefore they feel nothing? The truth is that the child won all our hearts today. My condolence, Monsieur le Comte, in your great loss."

The proprieties were restored between us. The concierge of the glass foundry was speaking to the seigneur of St. Gilles.



"You have done a lot for us today, Julie," I said. "I believed it better for you to break the news than anyone else. And I was right."

"She needed no telling," Julie answered. "It was she who told us. The dream had warned her, she said. For my part, I have never believed in dreams, Monsieur Jean. Only that children, like animals, are close to God. I suppose there will be a police inquiry?"

"A police inquiry?" I repeated.

"No doubt it is for the doctors to arrange. It is to be hoped it will be quickly over. These things are unpleasant."

I had been too dazed at the hospital, and too distressed, to consider such a thing as an inquiry. But Julie was right, of course. This must have been one of the things discussed by Paul and Blanche at the hospital after I left.

Marie-Noel came back. She kissed Julie and we said good-bye, and Gaston drove us to St. Gilles. As we passed through the gateway I saw there were four other cars in the drive below the terrace.



"There's Dr. Lebrun's car," said Marie-Noël, "and Monsieur Talbert's too. I don't know about the others."

Talbert—he was the lawyer who had written the letter I had found in the safe. No doubt he looked after the family affairs. Then, as we drew up behind the cars and got out, we saw a man in uniform seated behind the wheel of the front one.

"The car of the *commissaire de police*," Gaston murmured.

"Why do they all have to come?" asked Marie-Noël. "They aren't going to arrest anyone, surely?"

"They always come," I said, "if there's been an accident. I shall have to see them. Will you go and find Germaine and ask her to read to you?" She went up the terrace and in through the door, and I turned to Gaston.

"The *commissaire* will probably have to question your wife," I said.

"Yes, Monsieur le Comte."

He looked anxious. I was anxious too. The nightmare of the day was not yet over. I entered the château and heard voices coming from the salon. They ceased as I opened the door, and everyone turned and looked at me. I recognized Dr. Lebrun, and Dr. Moutier from the hospital. The third was small, thick-set, with greying hair. This was presumably the lawyer, Talbert. The fourth, who had a more official air, must be the *commissaire de police*.

My first thought was for the comtesse. I looked across the room at her, and saw that she was still sitting in the chair beside the fire-place, commanding, indomitable. She showed no sign of fatigue, and her presence filled the room, dwarfing the others.

"Here is my son, Monsieur," she said to the *commissaire*. And then turning to me, "Monsieur Lemotte has been so good as to come himself from Villars to ask the necessary questions."

The four men approached me, anxious to show their sympathy; it was only after many courtesies that the *commissaire* turned to me.

"Dr. Lebrun and Dr. Moutier have informed me, Monsieur, that your wife was expecting a child within a few weeks, and I understand there was some increase in nervousness lately," he said. "Would you agree?"

"Yes," I replied. "That's quite correct."

"She was, perhaps, unduly apprehensive about the birth?"

"I think she was."

"Excuse me, Monsieur," interrupted Talbert, the lawyer. "Monsieur le Comte will forgive the explanation, but the birth was eagerly awaited both by him and by Madame la Comtesse Jean. They hoped for a son because under the terms of her Marriage Settlement the birth of a son meant an immediate increase in income, above all to Monsieur le Comte. I know, from what she said to me, that Madame la Comtesse Jean dreaded disappointing her husband, and indeed the whole family. This would, I think, account for more nervousness than usual in her case."

The *commissaire* looked at Dr. Lebrun, who hesitated, glancing at the comtesse and at me.

"Madame Jean was certainly anxious for a son," he said. "In fact, she stressed the point when I attended her last. No doubt this anxiety added to her nervous state."

"In short," said the *commissaire*, "Madame la Comtesse Jean was inclined to hysteria. Forgive me, Monsieur, I only wish to establish that your wife was particularly agitated at the time of the accident, and therefore, in her condition, more liable to attacks of giddiness. I have examined the spot where she fell, and I propose going to the bedroom directly, with your approval."

"Of course," I said.

"I have already questioned Berthe, the woman who tends the cows. She saw your wife leaning from the window, as though reaching out—so she described it—and then she grasped at the air, as it seemed, and fell. Berthe screamed for help, and was heard by the cook and Charlotte, who went instantly to the moat. The cook telephoned for the ambulance from Villars. I should like to establish that nobody went to the bedroom after the *femme de chambre* took up her breakfast."

"Charlotte might have done," said Renée.

"Would you ring for her, Monsieur?" asked the *commissaire*.

"Charlotte is my personal maid: I will ring for her," said the comtesse. When Gaston answered the bell she told him the *commissaire* wished to speak to Charlotte.

"I don't quite follow," said Paul, "why it matters what Charlotte or

Germaine said to my sister-in-law. It has no bearing on the fact that she became giddy and fell from the window."

"I am sorry, Monsieur," said the *commissaire*. "I quite understand the distress all this must cause to the family. It is just that, to conform with the requirements of the law, I must establish beyond any shadow of doubt that the cause of the fall was accidental. Unhappily, when someone falls from a height this is not always the case."

Renée turned suddenly white. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"Madame," explained the *commissaire* gently, "when a person is in a highly nervous condition it leads them, sometimes, to do dangerous things. I am not suggesting that is what happened in this case, but I have to make quite sure."

"Do you mean," asked Blanche, "that my sister-in-law may have fallen from the window purposely?"

"It is possible, Madame. Not probable."

There was a sudden silence in the room, a silence filled, it seemed to me, as I looked from one to another of their troubled faces, with swift, unspoken denial, born of their inner guilt that each one of them might have contributed to Françoise's death.

The tension was broken as Charlotte came in, looking aggrieved and suspicious. "You sent for me, Madame la Comtesse?"

"The *commissaire de police* has some questions to ask you, Charlotte," replied the comtesse.

"I want to know," said the *commissaire*, "if you had any conversation with Madame la Comtesse Jean before the accident?"

Charlotte flashed an angry look at me, and I realized that she believed he was asking her this question because of some complaint of mine. "I only saw Madame Jean for a few minutes," she said.

"You found Madame la Comtesse Jean her usual self?" he asked.

Charlotte shrugged her shoulders. "I suppose so," she said sullenly. "I don't know. Madame Jean was easily depressed. She told me this last upset of hers had come about because some favourite pieces of porcelain had been broken. She set great store by her possessions. She even dusted them herself, and would let no one touch them. 'At least they're mine,' she used to say. 'They're not part of St. Gilles.'"

The venomous parting stroke embraced us all. The château stood

condemned. I wondered if the *commissaire* saw Françoise as I saw her, an isolated figure clinging to the treasures of the home she had left, lonely, neglected, sought after solely for her fortune.

He asked me whether he might now see the bedroom, and I took him upstairs, the others remaining below.

As we entered the room I saw that the shutters were no longer closed but flung wide, and the windows too thrust back against the wall. The child's body was across the sill, one hand grasping the window frame, the other, with her head and shoulders, out of sight. I heard the *commissaire* catch his breath. I put my hand on his arm. To dash forward was the impulse of us both, yet to do so might have startled her, causing her to lose the hold she already had. For the eternity of perhaps ten seconds we waited, immobile. Then the child's hand shifted its grip, the body wriggled across the sill, and she slipped back into the room to face us, her eyes shining, her hair dishevelled.

"I've got it," she said. "It was caught on the ledge."

The *commissaire* found his voice before I did: I could only stare at Marie-Noel, safe and unaware of danger, holding what looked like a duster. "What have you got, my child?" he asked gently.

"Maman's locket," she said, "the locket Papa brought her last week from Paris. She must have been shaking her duster out of the window, as she always did, and the locket was caught in it. They were lying together on the ledge below. I leant out and saw them." She came towards us. "If Maman had only rung her bell, Gaston or someone would have rescued them for her. But she was impatient. She thought she could reach them herself." She looked at the *commissaire*. "Are you religious?" she asked.

"I hope so, Mademoiselle," he said, taken aback.

"Papa is not. He is a sceptic. But finding the locket was an answer to prayer. I said to the Sainte Vierge, 'I did little for Maman when she was alive. Let me do something for her now she is dead.' The Sainte Vierge told me to lean out of the window. I did not want to do it. It was unpleasant. But I found the locket. I still don't know why that should help Maman, unless it is that to her, in Paradise, it seems better for her daughter to wear the locket than to let it lie forgotten on a ledge."

## CHAPTER 11

BEFORE the *commissaire* left he assured me that he was perfectly satisfied my wife had fallen accidentally from the window, but asked me to call on him the next day at eleven o'clock to complete certain formalities. He understood that my brother had arranged for the body to be brought home to the château afterwards. He left in his car, closely followed by the two doctors. Only the lawyer now remained with the family, and he had the grace to apologize for his presence.

"I only stayed, Monsieur," he said, "because I understand, from a conversation with your brother, that he knows nothing whatsoever of the terms of the new Carvalet contract, a copy of which they have sent me only this morning. I thought perhaps a few words while I am here might clarify the position."

"Nothing will clarify the position," I said, "except for my brother to read the contract, which he is at liberty to do whenever he pleases. I have it upstairs in my dressing-room now."

I threw a bunch of keys on the table. "It's in the valise in the wardrobe," I said. "Go and find it, if you like."

Marie-Noël jumped up. "I'll find it," she said, seizing the keys. She was out of the room before anyone thought of stopping her.

"Really, Paul," said Renée, "I hardly think this is the moment to start talking business."

Maître Talbert was ill at ease. "I apologize," he said. "I should not have mentioned the matter. Naturally, I am at your disposal for a full discussion on this and other matters at any time convenient to you after the funeral."

"The funeral will be on Friday," said the comtesse. "I have already arranged it with Monsieur le Curé. My daughter-in-law will be brought home the day after tomorrow and will lie here, so that our friends and everyone in the district will have time to pay their respects. I shall of course receive them." The lawyer bowed. "You will have the kindness, Maître, to see that notification of the death goes to the newspapers this evening, so that it can be read in tomorrow's editions. I have written the notices myself." She took some sheets of paper from her lap, and

handed them to him. "Monsieur le Curé is arranging with the Mother Superior of the convent at Lauray to send sisters to the château to watch during the nights of Wednesday and Thursday." She paused for reflection, tapping the arm of her chair with her fingers. "The bearers, of course, will be our own people on the estate."

The sound of Marie-Noel running down the stairs and across the hall could be heard through the open door.

"Not so much noise, child," said the comtesse as she burst into the room. "One should tread softly in a house of mourning."

Marie-Noel went straight to Paul and gave him the document. For a while there was no sound except the rustling of paper as Paul turned the pages of the contract. Then he turned to me.

"You realize," he said, his voice expressionless, betraying nothing of what he must have felt, "that this contract goes against all we agreed to before you went to Paris?"

"Yes," I said.

"That means everything you told Jacques and me on your return from Paris was a lie?"

"Yes," I said again.

"But why? What was the point of making fools of us all?"

"I didn't want to make fools of you," I said. "I thought it was the only way to save the *verrerie*. I changed my mind after I came back from Paris. Don't ask me why. You wouldn't understand."

"You've signed a duplicate and returned it to them?"

"I signed it in the office on Saturday, and posted it."

"Then there's nothing more to be done. You own the business, you can make what terms you please. It just means that, as far as I am concerned, trying to run it for you becomes impossible."

For a moment no one spoke. Then the comtesse reached for the bell beside the fire. "I think," she said, "that we needn't detain Maître Talbert any longer. A prolonged discussion on the future of the *verrerie* is quite out of place at the present time."

The lawyer shook hands with all of us and followed Gaston from the room. The comtesse turned to me. "You look tired, Jean," she said. "Why not rest? You have just an hour before we go to church for the special service of prayers for the dead for Françoise which Monsieur

le Curé has arranged. After that we shall all drive into Villars to the hospital chapel."

She fumbled for her spectacles, and began to scribble names and addresses on sheets of paper.

I went outside and stood in the grounds beyond the moat. The cattle had come to pasture, and the sun had dipped behind the trees. Paul came out and joined me. For a moment or two he smoked a cigarette in silence, then nervously he threw it away, saying abruptly, "I meant what I said just now: it is impossible to run the *verrerie* for you any more."

"What's your reason?" I asked.

"My reason?" He stared down into the moat. "We've never got on, you know that. You had all the favours and I the kicks. I've been used to that my whole life. You asked me to run the *verrerie* because nobody else would take it on after Maurice was shot, and you were too idle yourself. I did it for the family, not for you. At least, up to date, I've respected your business judgment, if nothing else. Now I can't even do that." His voice, resentful, bitter, sounded as though he had lost all faith not only in his work but in himself; as if what he had striven to do, through the years, had come to no account, the purpose gone.

"Supposing," I said slowly, "that in the future I rely upon your business judgment, not you on mine?"

"What do you mean?"

"Suppose, in the future, you take on the part of the business that involves travel—go to Paris, London, anywhere you please, get the orders, make fresh contacts—while I stay here?"

He straightened himself and looked at me, puzzled, unbelieving.

"Are you serious?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered. Then, because he looked doubtful still, "Don't you want to travel? Don't you want to get away?"

"Get away?" His laugh was short, mirthless. "Naturally I want to get away. I always have. But there was never the money, nor the opportunity. You never made it possible for me."

"I can make it possible for you now," I said.

"You mean," he said, "that you'd give me a free hand to travel in Europe, or even America, visiting other factories like ours, seeing how

they keep going by using more up-to-date methods, so that at the end of six months or so, when I got back, we might incorporate them here at St. Gilles?"

The voice, which had been bitter and resentful, was suddenly interested, alert; he was seeing himself transformed into the one who made decisions, bringing fresh blood to what had been decayed and dying, thereby saving both tradition and himself.

"I believe you could do all that and more," I said. "Talk to Renée, see what she says. I don't want to force you to it."

"Renée . . . ." For a moment he frowned, thinking hard, then awkwardly, a little diffident, he said, "It might be the answer for us both. We haven't been very happy—you've known that. She's felt herself wasted at St. Gilles, whereas if we were travelling, meeting people, and she had something to think about, she'd stop being bored and dissatisfied, and I'd be a better companion. I wouldn't seem the country boor that I do to her now."

He stood staring in front of him, the new image of himself taking shape and substance, and oddly, with a sort of poignancy, I saw the image too. Through his eyes I saw Renée smiling upon him, elegant and sleek, the pair of them enveloped in a little cloud of their own success which would make them kinder to one another.

"Can I discuss this with Renée, now, tonight?" he asked abruptly. "Before there's any chance of your changing your mind?"

"I shan't change my mind," I said. "Good luck to you, Paul." And foolishly, like an old-fashioned figure in a drawing-room comedy, I put out my hand to him, and he shook it, stiffly, as though sealing a pact, before he turned and disappeared into the château.

When the church bell tolled solemnly, breaking the stillness, I went and joined the others in the hall. Both cars were drawn up below the terrace, with Gaston in uniform at the wheel of the first and Paul at the second, and the three women, already in deep black, followed by Marie-Noël in a dark winter coat, entered the cars in some order of precedence which had already been decided upon—the comtesse, myself and the child in the Renault, and Paul driving his sister and his wife.

Slowly we proceeded through the gateway and over the bridge, and slowly, at the same sober pace, descended from the cars, entered the



church, and took our places at the front. I wondered, kneeling there, listening to the prayers, what petitions went up in fervour or humility from those beside me, whether they asked for the repose of the absent Françoise or pardon for themselves.

The service over, we drove to Villars to stand for a few moments in the chapel. Strangely, it was not, as I had expected, distressing and macabre. The now waxen and infinitely remote figure of Françoise was not the person we had all betrayed, but something mummified and distant, discovered after centuries in an Egyptian tomb.

It was nearly half past eight by the time we returned to the château for dinner. The comtesse, whom I had never before seen in the dining-room, took her place opposite me at the end of the table, and her presence there gave sudden warmth and distinction to the room. Only after the dessert had been served and the tray of coffee cups taken to the salon did she, for the first time, flag; and, glancing at her, I saw that she had turned suddenly grey. The beads of perspiration stood out on her forehead, and her eyes, flickering restlessly about the room, lost all life and concentration. Quietly I said, "I'm going to take you upstairs."

She stared at me as if she did not understand, and then, when I put out my arm to her, she leant upon it, trembling. I said, loudly, so that the others heard, "I think it would be much better if we went over the lists together in your room."

She straightened herself, gripping my arm more firmly, and as we moved towards the door she said clearly, without difficulty, "Good night, good night, everybody. Don't disturb yourselves. Jean and I have matters we prefer to discuss upstairs."

They all rose instantly, and Blanche said, "You should never have come down, Maman. It has been too much for you."

Her words had just the necessary sting to waken response, and in a second her mother turned, loosening her hold upon my arm, retorting, "When I want advice from you I'll ask for it. There are four hundred envelopes to address before tomorrow evening. I suggest you make a start tonight, and the child can help."

We went out of the room and climbed the stairs together to the first corridor. As she paused for a moment to regain breath she said, "Why did I say that? What are the invitations for?"

"The funeral," I said, "the funeral on Friday."

"Whose funeral?"

"Françoise's," I replied. "Françoise died today."

"Of course," she said. "For a moment I forgot. I was thinking of that time we made lists for Blanche's wedding. We had the invitations printed, and then none of them were used."

Charlotte opened the door for us, and I could see at once from her face that she was frightened. She whispered to me, "The boxes have gone from the dressing-room."

"I know," I said. "I took them away."

"What for?" she said. "I shall need them tonight."

"No," I said. I pushed by her, following the comtesse, and said, "Undress and get into bed, Maman. You may sleep, you may not; it doesn't matter. I shall stay here with you tonight."

Her shadow, reflected on the ceiling, monstrous and overpowering like a witch, seemed part of the heavy curtains and the hangings to the bed; but when she turned and looked at me the shadow shrank to the ground, and the smile belonged to the woman who had held court downstairs, opposing tragedy with her own pride. "The tables are turned," she said. "You had a high temperature once when you were twelve years old. I sat in your room beside you and bathed your face. Is that what you're prepared to do for me tonight?"

She laughed and waved me from the room, calling to Charlotte. I went down to the salon, and found the others preparing to go to their rooms. Marie-Noël went towards the stairs hand in hand with Blanche, her small face white with fatigue.

"You'll come and say good night, Papa?" she asked.

"Yes," I promised, and went into the dining-room for a cigarette. When I returned to the hall I found that René had not followed the others, but was waiting for me on the stairs.

"So you want to get rid of us, Paul and me?" she said. "Have you been planning this ever since you returned from Paris?"

I shook my head. "There's no question of its being planned," I told her. "This evening the idea came to me, that's all. If you dislike the thought, put it out of your head."

She did not say anything for a moment. She seemed to be considering

something, and then she said slowly, "You've altered, Jean. I don't just mean you've changed towards me. I realize now that you were bored, there was nothing else for you to do, and I happened to be here. You've changed somehow in yourself, become harder, more withdrawn."

"Harder?" I said. "I should have thought the reverse. Softer, weaker in every way."

"Oh no. You're more detached, not only to me, to everyone." She considered me thoughtfully. "That's why it surprised Paul and me that you suggested that we should travel, and not you. This past week you have given the impression that the one thing in the world you wanted was to get away."

I stared at her, disconcerted. "I gave that impression?"

"Frankly, yes."

"It isn't true," I said. "I've never stopped thinking about all of you, day and night. The last thing I want to do is to go away."

She looked incredulous. "I don't understand you," she said. "I suppose the truth is that I never have. You were never in love with me for one minute, were you?"

"I'm not in love with you now, Renée," I said. "I don't know about the past, but I rather doubt it."

She drew in her breath. "A week ago I couldn't have left St. Gilles, but now"—she turned and began to climb the stairs—"now I know I can't go on living here."

I watched her disappear along the corridor, and, as I switched off the light and climbed the stairs in darkness, it seemed to me that what I had done to these two, Paul and Renée, was not the action of my own self, nor yet that of Jean de Gué, whose shadow I had become, but the work of a third—someone who was neither he nor I but a fusion of the two of us, who was born not of thought but of intuition, and brought release to us both.

At the top of Marie-Noël's turret stairs I turned the handle of her door, expecting to find her still dressed, or at her prie-dieu. But the long day had closed upon her at last. She was in bed, asleep. The chapel had not left her untouched, as I had thought. Two lighted candles stood at the foot of the bed, and a toy duck now knelt in prayer between them.

I blew out the candles, and, leaving the window open, closed the

shutters. Then I went down the turret stairs and through to the other side of the *château*, to that other room in the tower. Here there were no candles burning, only a light beside the bed, and the woman on the pillows was not asleep like the child, but awake and watchful. Her eyes, sunk in her grey, exhausted face, stared up to mine. "I thought you weren't coming," she said.

I sat down close to the bed and put out my hand to her. She held it fast.

"I sent Charlotte to her room," she said. "I told her, 'Monsieur le Comte is looking after me tonight. I don't need you.' That's what you meant me to say, didn't you?"

"Yes, Maman," I answered.

Her grip tightened, and I knew she would hold it thus, through the night, as her defence against darkness, and I must not move, nor withdraw it, for if I did the bond would be loosened, and the meaning lost.

"I've been thinking," she said. "In a few days' time, when everything's over, I shall leave this room and go downstairs to my old one. It's more practical. I can keep my eye on things."

"Just as you like," I answered.

"Lying here," she said, "I find my memory goes. I don't know if I am in the present or the past. And I have bad dreams."

The gilt clock beside her bed ticked loudly, and the pendulum, showing through a glass case, moved backward, forward, the two combining to make the minutes slow.

"If you dream tonight," I said, "I shall be here. It won't matter."

I leant forward and turned out the light with my burnt hand, and at once the darkness seemed to press upon me, enveloping me. The despair that was in the shadows invaded me, and she began to talk and mutter in a half-sleep that I could not share but could only listen to, with the ticking clock. Sometimes she called out, cursing, sometimes she fell into a prayer, once she broke into uncontrollable laughter; but never, as the fragmentary thoughts pursued her, did she clamour for relief, nor yet release my hand. When, just after five o'clock, she fell asleep and I leant forward and looked down at her, her face seemed to me no longer a mask, haggard, fearful, hiding the torment of months and years; but peaceful, relaxed and oddly beautiful, not even old.



I rose from the chair and went out of the room, down through the silent house to the salon, and, opening the shutters, let myself out on to the terrace. I crossed the moat and walked up the pathway under the chestnut trees, and so to the rides and the stone huntress standing in the midst of them.

I sat by the base of the huntress and waited for the day, and as the sky paled, and the light came, and the village and the château took on shape and substance, I was no longer isolated, watching apart, numb with exhaustion, but one among many, part of St. Gilles. I knew suddenly, with conviction, that it was not a stranger's curiosity that drew me to the people of this village, a sentimental attraction to the picturesque, but something deeper, more intimate, a desire so intense for their well-being and their future that although akin to love it resembled pain. Finally I got up and walked across the park to the château, and when I had crossed the moat and stood beneath her room, I saw Blanche. I saw her reach to the windows to close them but before she could do

so I called to her, "My hand is troubling me. Would you dress it for me?"

She did not answer but withdrew into her room, leaving the windows open, from which I concluded that she did not refuse to help me. Going to her room, I knocked, but, hearing no answer, turned the handle and entered. She was standing by a table unrolling a fresh dressing.

She did not look at me, but took my hand in hers and removed the dressing, her action that of an automaton, silent, unconcerned.

"If you made a vow of silence," I said to her, "you broke it yesterday, in the hospital. It isn't valid any more." She did not answer. "Fifteen years ago," I said, "the death of one person came between us. It took the death of another, yesterday, to loosen your tongue. Wouldn't it be simpler for us, and the family too, if we made an end to silence?"

"It would be simpler for you," she said, without raising her eyes, "just as it was simpler for you to let Françoise die."

"I did not let her die," I said.

"You lied about your blood," she said. "You lied about that contract. You've lied about everything, always, through the years. I don't want to speak to you, now or in the future. We have nothing to say to one another."

She had finished the dressing. She let go my hand. The gesture was final, a dismissal. I looked about me, at the severity, the coldness, the tortured pictures of the scourged Christ, the crucified Christ, that must face her upon the blank impersonal walls as she lay there in her high narrow bed, and I said to her, "Is that why you hang those pictures there? To remind yourself that you can't forgive?"

She turned and looked at me, the eyes bitter, the mouth hard.

"Don't mock my God," she said. "You've destroyed everything else in my life. Leave Him to me."

"Would you have hung them in the master's house?" I asked.

"Would they have gone as part of your dowry to Maurice Duval?"

Now at last I had broken down reserve. The agony of years came to the surface, showing in her mouth and eyes like a sudden flame. "How dare you speak of him?" she said. "How dare you even utter his name? Do you think I ever forget one moment, day or night, what you did to him?"

"No," I said, "you haven't forgotten. Nor have I. You can't forgive me—perhaps I can't forgive myself."

What I had hoped for, and what I had also feared, then happened. Tears rose in her eyes, ran down her cheeks: not the grief of sudden loss or pain, but the anguish of years. She went over to the window and stood beside it looking out, her back defenceless, betraying the emotion that I could not see. Presently she turned, dry-eyed now, composed, and yet more vulnerable because of the grief she had shown before me.

"What are you waiting for?" she asked. "Why are you still here?"

I could not ask forgiveness for something I had not done. As scapegoat, I could only bear the fault.

"I was looking in the album last week," I said. "I found the old snapshots of ourselves as children. And later ones as well. Groups at the *verrerie*, with Maurice there amongst them."

"Well?" she asked. "What of it?"

"Nothing," I answered. "Only that I wished what came about fifteen years ago had never happened."

Perhaps because what I said was out of character, unexpected, she looked up at me, startled momentarily out of her composure, and then, seeing that I spoke sincerely, without cynicism or any sort of mockery, she said quietly, "Why?"

My own truth was all that I could give her. If she did not believe it there was no more to say. "I liked his face," I said. "I had never looked at those photographs before. I realized, turning the pages, that he was good, and that the workmen must have loved and respected him. It came to me that when he was killed it was through jealousy; the man who shot him, or ordered him to be shot, did it not from mistaken patriotism but because he envied him, because Maurice Duval was finer than he was himself."

She stared at me, incredulous, and I supposed that what I was telling her was so alien to anything her brother might have said that she could not accept it. "If you want to make your confession," she said, "don't make it to me. It's fifteen years too late."

She moved about the room, straightening things already orderly, using preoccupation to disguise emotion. "What use is it to either of us



now to come here and accuse yourself? You can't restore the past. You can't bring Maurice back. You hadn't even the courage to shoot him yourself, but went that night to the *verrerie* pretending to be alone, asking him to hide you; and he came down and opened the door to let you in, and there you stood with your little band of murderers. God may forgive you, Jean, I can't."

She went and stood by the window once again, the air coming fresh and cool into the room. But when I followed her she did not move away, which seemed to me forgiveness in itself.

"From the first you were against Maurice, you and Maman," she said. "Even in the early days, when he first came to work at the *verrerie*, you were envious because Papa thought so much of him, though you took no interest in the *verrerie* yourself. Then later, when Papa gave him control and made him master, you began to hate him. I can see you now, you and Maman, in the salon, laughing, and Maman saying, 'Can it be that Blanche, the fastidious Mademoiselle de Gué, is amorous at last?'"

She stared out across the park, and her profile now was the profile of the girl in the album, already sombre, already reserved, possessor of a secret she did not wish revealed.

"Ridicule was your weapon always, yours and Maman's," she said. "Because Maurice came from the people, you pretended to despise him. Papa was never like that, he understood. He wouldn't have tried to prevent us marrying, as you did. With the Occupation, you had your chance. So easy, wasn't it, to make murder seem heroic? It happened in other families. Ours wasn't the only one."

She gestured with her hands. It was suddenly over. The past was the past. She turned and looked at the alcove, bare and simple like a convent cell, the prie-dieu in the corner, the crucifix above.



"Now I have this," she said, "instead of the master's house."

I think that what endeared her to me most was that she still used "tu," the intimate form of "you." The custom of a lifetime could not be broken by the silence of fifteen years. There was hope for the future in this if nothing else.

"I want you to go to the master's house and make it yours," I said. "I want you to make it come alive again, as it was when Maurice had it, to be the master now in place of him." Dumbfounded, she stared at me in disbelief, and swiftly, so that she could not reject me utterly, I went on talking. "I've told Paul he can get away, travel, he and Renée. Paul has never had a chance of showing what he can do in business, in meeting people, outside St. Gilles. It's time he did."

Perhaps it was the note of urgency in my voice that most astounded her. She sat down, not realizing, I believe, that she did so, and stared at me, clasping the arms of her chair.

"Someone in the family has to take over," I said. "I can't. I've never had the slightest interest in the *verrière*. The only person who understands and loves it is yourself. If you had married Maurice you would have made something of it, instead of letting it decay and become out of date, which it is today. When Marie-Noel grows up it will be hers. If she marries it can be her dowry. I want it to be your trust, your responsibility, because of Maurice, because of Marie-Noel."

Still she said nothing. I think if I had struck her across the face she could not have been more stunned. "The house is waiting there for you," I said. "It's been waiting for fifteen years. Pictures, china, tables, chairs, even his books, all the things you would have used together. You could design and engrave again, as you did once. And then, instead of sending scent bottles and medicine phials to a firm like Carvalet, who would do better to buy them mass-produced, you could choose your own market, the market Paul will find for you, demanding fine workmanship, artistry, skill, which was what St. Gilles gave once, long ago, and can give again."

I paused, exhausted, drained suddenly of energy, of thought. And just as holding the mother's hand through the night had seemed to invest me with her own past phantoms of regret, so the eyes of Blanche, upon me now, lost their bitterness, becoming reflective, considerate, even

kind, while the loneliness that had been hers was now my loneliness, my pain, engulfing me in a darkness that must be carried and endured.

I left her sitting there, and went to the dressing-room. I flung myself on the bed, closed my eyes and slept dreamlessly until past ten, when I awoke to find Gaston shaking me by the shoulder, telling me that I had to see the *commissaire de police* at eleven o'clock.

I got up, shaved and bathed and dressed again, and went with him into the town. The formalities were soon over: the *commissaire* simply wished me to read and verify the notes he had taken the previous day. When I came out Vincent, who helped Béla at "L'Antiquaire du Pont," was waiting to speak to me. He had a small package in his hands.

"Forgive me, Monsieur le Comte," he said. "Madame could not get in touch with you in any other way. This package came from Paris yesterday. She knows now it arrived too late. She is so sorry for this. But she wanted me to give it to you, for the little girl."

I took the package from him. "What is it?" I asked.

"Some porcelain was broken. The little girl asked Madame if it could be mended. Instead, she sent to Paris for duplicates. She asked me to beg you not to tell the little girl they are substitutes. She believes the child would be happier to keep them in memory of her mother if she believes they are the broken ones made whole."

I thanked him, and then, hesitating, asked, "Did Madame send any other message to me?"

"No, Monsieur le Comte. Just that, and her deep sympathy."

## CHAPTER 12

WHEN WE got back to St. Gilles I saw Marie-Noel waiting for me on the terrace. She ran forward and flung herself upon me. "Gran'mie was down early, before eleven," she said. "She's in the salon, preparing it for Maman, and Madame Yves is helping her. Gran'mie said she was the only person who remembered how things were arranged when my grandfather died. They are arguing now about the position of the table."

She took my hand and led me to the salon, where I could hear the sound of voices raised in dispute. The shutters were still closed, the

lights on, and the sofa and chairs had been turned to face the centre of the room. A long table, covered with a lace cloth, stood between the windows and the floor. The comtesse was sitting on a chair beside the table, and Julie, with another white drapery over her arm, confronted her.

"But I assure you, Madame la Comtesse, the table was more in the centre and we did not use the lace cloth but the damask, which I found myself just now at the back of the linen-room, pushed in any old way."

"Nonsense," answered the comtesse. "We used the lace. The lace was in my mother's family for a hundred years."

"Very possibly, Madame la Comtesse," said Julie. "I don't dispute it. I remember the lace cloth perfectly; but the white damask is more suitable for mourning, just as it was in 1938 for Monsieur le Comte."

"I don't care," said the comtesse. "I prefer the lace. It may be more ostentatious than the damask, but what of it? I intend my daughter-in-law to have the best."

"In that case," said Julie, "there's no more to be said. The lace it will have to be. And I suppose the damask must go back to the linen-room to be forgotten for another twenty years. Who looks after things nowadays at the château, I ask myself? It wasn't like this in the old days."

She sighed, folding the damask cloth on the end of the table.

"What else do you expect," said the comtesse, "with servants as they are today, without pride in their work?"

"Then it's the fault of the mistress," said Julie. "A good mistress makes a good servant. I remember when you used to come down into the kitchen we none of us spoke afterwards for half an hour, we were so frightened. That is how it should be. But today——" She shook her head.

"I've been ill," said the comtesse. "Things have got out of hand. It will be different in the future."

"I hope so," said Julie. "It was time."

"You say that because you're jealous," said the comtesse. "You always liked coming up here poking your nose into what didn't concern you."

"It does concern me," said Julie. "Anything that happens here to you, Madame la Comtesse, or to any of the family, concerns me."

"You haven't enough to do," said the comtesse, "that's your trouble."

In the future you can come up twice a week and help me set things in order once again. I was right, though, about the lace cloth."

"You are free to form your own opinion, Madame la Comtesse," said Julie. "I won't argue with you. But if it's the last word I ever utter, I shall insist that it was the damask cloth we used at the funeral of Monsieur le Comte."

They stared across the table at one another in perfect understanding. Then the comtesse, aware of my presence for the first time, wished me good day. "Everything went well?" she asked. "The *commissaire* had nothing to say?"

"No."

"The authorities were satisfied?"

"Perfectly."

"Then we can proceed with the arrangements. You had better help Renée address the envelopes. Blanche has disappeared. I suppose, as usual, she's in church. Now go along, both of you, Julie and I have work to do."

We met Gaston in the hall, bringing the packet I had left in the car. I took it from him and went upstairs to the bedroom, the child following me.

"What is it?" she said. "Have you bought something?"

I did not answer. I undid the string and opened the paper. The Copenhagen cat and dog, perfect replicas of the ones that had been broken, lay revealed. I put them on the table where they belonged and then glanced at Marie-Noël. She stood with her hands clasped, smiling.

"You would never know," she said. "You could never tell that anything had happened. They are perfect. Just as if they hadn't been broken. Now I feel myself forgiven."

We went down to the library, and the lists were waiting for us on the desk. But nobody was there addressing the envelopes, neither Paul nor Renée nor Blanche.

"Where's everyone gone?" I said to the child.

She had already seized an envelope and was addressing it in a careful sloping hand. "I'm not supposed to say," she said, "because Gran'mie doesn't know. Aunt Renée is in her bedroom, looking through all her winter clothes. She told me, as a great secret, that she and Uncle Paul

are going to travel, and later on they might even have an apartment in Paris. She said she would ask me to stay with them."

"Is Uncle Paul also upstairs looking through his clothes?" I asked.

"Oh no," she answered, "he's gone down to the *verrerie*. Aunt Blanche went with him, and that's a secret too. Aunt Blanche wants to look through the furniture that's stored at the master's house. She said it was a waste nobody lived there, and it ought to be made habitable once again." For a few moments she addressed the envelopes in silence. Then she raised her head, and biting the end of her pen said, "Rather a dreadful thought came to me just now. I don't know whether to tell it to you or not."

"Go ahead," I said.

"It's just that suddenly," she said, "since Maman died, everyone is getting what they want. Gran'mie, who loves everyone to notice her, has come downstairs. Uncle Paul and Aunt Renée are going to travel, which has made them pleased. Aunt Blanche has gone to look at the master's house, where long ago she meant to live. Even Madame Yves is bustling with the linen, which makes her feel important. You have got the money you wanted, and can go spending now as much as you please. As for me"—she hesitated, her eyes troubled, a little sad—"as for me, I have you to myself for the rest of my days."

Through the half-open double doors I heard the sudden ring of the telephone.

"The thing is," she went on, "would any of these things have happened if Maman hadn't died?"

Her question, devastating, terrible, seemed to shake the foundation of all belief. "Yes," I said swiftly, "they had to happen, they were bound to happen. It's nothing to do with Maman dying. If she had lived they would have come about just the same."

Still she looked doubtful, not entirely satisfied. "When the *bon Dieu* arranges things, everything is for the best," she said, "but sometimes the devil tempts us in disguise."

The ringing of the telephone ceased. Gaston was answering it in the lobby. In a moment or two his footsteps sounded in the dining-room, coming towards us.

"The point is to discover which is which," said Marie-Noel, "who

gives us the things we want, God or the devil." It must be one or the other, but how do you tell?"

Gaston came to the double doors and said, "Monsieur le Comte is wanted on the telephone."

I got up and went through to the lobby in the hall. I lifted the old-fashioned receiver. "Who's there?" I asked.

Someone said, "*Ne quittez pas*," the line blurred and indistinct, as though it came from a distance. Then, after a minute, another voice, a man's, said, "Am I speaking to the Comte de Gué?"

"Yes," I answered.

There was a pause. The speaker at the other end seemed to be thinking, deciding what to say.

"Who is it?" I said. "What do you want?"

Then softly, almost in a whisper, the voice replied, "It's me, Jean de Gué. I've just seen today's newspaper. I'm coming back."

INSTINCT denied him. Mind, body, spirit united in revolt against him. He no longer existed. He was not real. The whisper at the other end of the telephone was imaginary, conjured up by fatigue. I waited, not answering. And then in a moment he spoke again.

"You are there?" he said. "The *remplaçant*?"

I suppose, because I heard a footstep in the hall, caution seized me and the conventional being who gives orders, takes them, makes arrangements and plans spoke into the mouthpiece for me.

"Yes," I said, "I'm here."

"I'm speaking from Deauville," he said. "I have your car. I intend driving to St. Gilles later in the day. It's no use arriving before dusk—I might be seen. I suggest we meet at seven."

The cool assurance with which he spoke, believing I would fall in with his plans, made me hate him the more. "Where?" I asked.

There was silence for a moment while he thought. Then, softly, he said, "You know the master's house at the *verrière*?"

"Yes," I said.

"I'll leave the car on a side-track in the woods," he said, "and come across the orchard. Wait for me inside the house and let me in. I'll be with you there as soon after seven as I can."

He did not say good-bye. The telephone clicked as he hung up.

Although the emotion that filled me now was violent, overwhelming, yet at the same time I felt deliberate and calm. I was the possessor now, he the intruder. The château was my château, the family who in a few minutes would sit with me round the table were my family; they belonged to me and I to them. He could not return and make them his again.

I went into the salon, and the comtesse was sitting there.

"Who was that on the telephone?" she asked.

"No one of any importance," I replied. "Someone who had seen the morning newspaper."

"In the old days, no one would have telephoned at such a time. It shows want of tact. However, good manners are a thing of the past."

I went over to her and took her hand. "I want to know how you feel," I said.

She looked up at me and smiled. "We had a vigil, didn't we? You slept in your chair. As for me, I never closed my eyes. If you think this business is going to be easy, you're mistaken."

"I never said it would be easy," I answered. "It's going to be the hardest thing you've ever done."

"I have to deny myself peace and pleasant dreams for your sake," she said. "That's what it amounts to, doesn't it? Just because you want me about the place. How do I know you won't change your mind again and banish me upstairs?"

"No," I said. "No . . . no . . ."

My sudden violence amused her, and she reached up and patted my cheek.

"You're spoilt," she said, "that's your trouble. Julie and I agreed upon it this morning."

Gaston came into the salon and announced lunch, in his new hushed voice suited to mourning. The others were already in the dining-room, and as the mother took her seat opposite me I said, "Now you are back again, where you belong, I intend making other changes too. Paul isn't going to direct the *vêrrierie* any more. He's going to travel, with Renée."

My statement left her unmoved. Giving a piece of kidney from her plate to the terriers crouched on either side of her, she said, "An

excellent idea. They ought to have gone before." But who will take his place? Not Jacques, surely? He hasn't the authority."

"Blanche," I replied. "She knows more about the *verrerie* than any of us. In the future she will live at the master's house."

Even this failed to excite her. She said almost placidly, "I always said Blanche had a head for business. She'll have the tourists here in no time at all. A shop inside the gates, selling replicas of the château and the church, ice creams from Julie at the lodge. It would have happened long ago, only that the war intervened."

She went on eating.

Paul, throwing a look at me, said quickly, "You don't disapprove, then? Of either plan?"

"Disapprove?" she echoed. "Why should I disapprove? Both suggestions suit me well."

I was aware of Marie-Noël watching me from across the table. "Well?" I said. "What now?"

"You've made plans for everyone but yourself," she said. "What are you going to do when everybody's gone?"

Her question caught attention from the rest. They all looked at me, curious.

"I shall stay here," I said, "at the château, at St. Gilles. I've no intention of going away. I shall stay here always."

My remark sounded perhaps too vehement, too tense. They were looking at me, puzzled, oddly strained.

Marie-Noël, the only one without embarrassment, exclaimed, "When there's a sudden silence, and nobody speaks, it means there's an angel in the room, so Germaine told me. I'm not altogether sure. It could be a demon."

Then Gaston came with vegetables. The moment passed, and everyone began to talk at once, except myself. I knew now what I was going to do. I had remembered the service revolver in the drawer of the library desk. I should have no remorse and no regret. He would receive the welcome he deserved. Even the rendezvous he had chosen, the master's house, was added justice. The only thing I minded was, somehow getting rid of my car, but it belonged to a past I had forgotten anyway. The project, born in an instant, took shape, becoming clear. Like him,



I would walk to the master's house through the woods, and, crossing the orchard at the back, climb through the window. There would be no witnesses to this encounter.

After lunch my opportunity came. Blanche and the child went upstairs for lessons. The mother called the others to see the rearrangement of the salon. I went to the library, got the revolver from the desk and opened it. It was loaded. I slipped it into my coat pocket, went upstairs to the dressing-room and put it away in the drawer beside the boxes containing the morphine and the syringe.

When I came downstairs I realized I had been only just in time. They were moving into the library. Paul sat down at the desk, Renée at the table, and both began addressing envelopes. The mother, settling herself in a chair where she could watch, put out her hand to me. "You're restless," she said. "What's on your mind?"

As I looked at her I reminded myself that it was not her son I was going to kill but someone without emotions, without heart, who had no feeling for her or anyone else. She recognized me as her son. In the future I should do everything for her that he had failed to do. "I want to bury the past," I said. "That's the only thing on my mind."

"Just as you like," she said. "I ask for nothing better, if it works. The whole thing is a conspiracy, of course, to make life more pleasant for yourself. Come and sit down."

She gestured to the chair beside her and I sat down, still holding her hand. Presently, I saw she slept.

Paul said quietly, "She's doing much too much. She'll suffer for it later. You ought to stop her."

"No," I said, "it's better this way."

The long afternoon wore on. There was no sound but the scratching of the pens. I looked at the mother's face, asleep, and knew suddenly I must go before she woke, before the child came down. Paul had his back to me, and Renée also. They must none of them know where I was going. Some impulse, like touching wood to ward off danger, made me kiss the mother's hand. Then I rose and went out of the room. No one looked up or called me back.

I fetched the revolver from the dressing-room and went out of the front door on to the terrace and round the side of the château, through

the garden door and into the park. Never had the forest seemed more beautiful or more benign, the hot sun gilding the falling leaves. When I came to the field bordering the foundry grounds I lay down and waited. It was no use entering the master's house until Jacques had gone and the men had stopped work for the day. Lying there in the woods, I could see the wisp of smoke coming from the foundry chimney, and I began to get impatient.

Two hours must have passed. I had no means of telling, without a watch, but of a sudden the air became more chill, the sun had dipped behind the trees, and I was aware of silence. All sounds from the foundry had ceased.

I got up, crossed the orchard, keeping close to the hedge, and stood against the wall of the master's house. I waited a moment, then, sheltered by the vine, looked in at the office window. The room was empty, Jacques had gone home, and I had the place to myself. I moved along the house to the farther end and climbed through a window. The room was full of traces of Blanche and Paul. Some of the furniture had already been shifted, tables and chairs pulled forward, pictures moved. The room was no longer a shell, housing the past, but waited, expectant, for Blanche to bring life to it once more.

I sat waiting, too, for the man I meant to kill. Sunlight went from the room, and the shadows grew. In half an hour or less it would be dusk, and when he came, knocking on the window or the door, he would find that what happened to him was his own crime in reverse. He, and not I, would go back fifteen years.

I saw the handle of the door turn first, and because of disuse the knob fell to the floor. The door did not open, for I had bolted it. I crossed the room, picked up the knob and fitted it back. Slowly I withdrew the bolt, holding the revolver ready. I opened the door. It was thus, I thought, that Maurice Duval must have opened the door that night, and found him standing there in the darkness. Then, I heard an exclamation from without and a voice—not his—said, "Hullo, is there somebody in the house?" It was not Jean de Gué, it was the curé. We confronted one another, I shaken and nonplussed, he smiling, nodding, until his eye, falling upon the revolver, oddly changed.

"Will you allow me?" he said, and he put out his hand and took the

revolver from me before I knew what he was about. Then he emptied it, putting the cartridges in the pocket beneath his cassock, and the revolver also.

"I don't like those things," he said. "They caused a lot of damage during the war and they could do so again."

He looked up at me, his head nodding agreement, and because I was without words, unable to speak, he patted my arm and said, "Don't be angry. You'll be glad I took it away from you one of these days. You had planned destruction, hadn't you?"

I didn't answer him at once. Then I said, "Yes, Father."

"Very well," he said, "we won't discuss it. It's a matter for your own conscience and for God. It's not my business to ask you what is wrong. But it is my business to save life if I can. Perhaps, if I had not happened to pass by, something would have happened to cause grief to all of us. There has been tragedy enough in your family without your adding to it."

"I wasn't going to add to tragedy, Father," I said. "I hoped to remove the cause."



"By destroying yourself?" he asked. "What good would that do, to you or to them? By living, you can create their world afresh. Already I see signs of it, here in the master's house. That's what's needed: life, not death."

He waited for me to answer. I said nothing.

He hesitated, his eyes anxious. "I'm not sure that I'm happy to leave you," he said, "after what I discovered just now. You might still do something rash."

"I can't," I said. "You've made it impossible."

He smiled. "I'm glad," he said. "I shall never regret it. As for your gun"—he patted his cassock—"perhaps I'll let you have it back again, one of these days. *Bonsoir.*"

He went out of the doorway into the dusk. I watched him pass the well without a glance, and so across the ground towards the sheds. I closed the door and bolted it again. The room was now filled with shadows, the day was done.

As I went to the window facing the orchard a figure rose from beneath it, gun in hand, and, throwing his legs across the sill, climbed in. Laughing softly, pointing the gun at my chest, he said, "That's how I worked it once before, but this was far easier. No sentries, no road-blocks, and instead of a bunch of lads who might give me away under threat, good Monsieur le Curé himself, who happened to pass by. You must admit that luck is always on my side. I was right, wasn't I, to come armed? It was the only thing I didn't leave you in my valise in Le Mans."

He pulled forward two of the chairs that Blanche had moved that morning. "Sit down," he said. "You don't have to keep your hands up. This isn't a threat, merely a precaution. I've always carried a gun since '41." He straddled the other chair, facing me. The back of it made a resting-place for the gun. "So you planned to get rid of me, did you, and stay in St. Gilles? The sudden prospect of a fortune was too much for you? I sympathize. I felt that way myself."

## CHAPTER 13

I COULDN'T see his eyes, but only his features, dimly, which were mine. The absence of light made his presence, although more sinister, somehow easier to bear.

"What happened?" he asked. "How did she die? The notice I read this morning said by accident."

"She fell," I answered, "from the window of her bedroom. She had dropped the locket brooch you brought her from Paris, and was reaching for it. Tomorrow they bring her back to St. Gilles, and the funeral is on Friday."

"I read that in the papers," he said. "That's why I returned."

I made no comment. It was not his wife's funeral which had brought him home, but what her death would mean to him hereafter.

"You know," he said, "I never thought you'd face it. When I left you in that hotel bedroom, I imagined you going to the police, and, after many muddled explanations, persuading them to believe your story. Instead"—he laughed—"you've succeeded in living a lie for seven whole days. My congratulations. Has no one any suspicion?"

"No one," I said.

"What about my mother, and the child?"

"They least of all."

To say this gave me a strange sort of satisfaction that was almost savage.

He had not been missed; no one had regretted him.

"I wonder how much you learned," he said. "It amuses me to think of how you dealt with Renée, who was becoming a bore. And how you kept Françoise pacified. And whether, with misplaced courtesy, you tried to talk to Blanche. As for my mother, her demands can only be dealt with in the future by a doctor: not our own, but an expert. She'll have to go to a clinic. I'm already in touch with one, in Paris."

I watched the muzzle of the revolver on the back of his chair. I should never reach it. Expert in trickery as in all things, he would be too quick for me.

"There's no need to send her to Paris," I said. "Though I expect she will need medical care at home. She wants to stop the drug. I was with her all last night. She's made the first attempt."

I could feel his eyes upon me.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "You were with her all last night? What did you do?"

I thought back to the chair beside her bed, to the half-dreams, to the silence, to the threatening shadows that seemed to dissolve and pass. To tell him about the night now sounded trite, absurd. Nothing had been accomplished, only sleep.

"I sat beside her and she slept," I said. "I held her hand."

His laughter, infectious yet intolerable, rang through the dark room. "My poor friend," he said, "do you imagine that is the way to cure a

morphine addict? Tonight she'll be a raving maniac. Charlotte will have to give her a double dose."

"No," I said. "No." But doubt assailed me. Already, when I left her, sleeping in her chair, she had looked ill and exhausted.

"What else?" he said. "Tell me what else you've done."

What else? I searched my mind. "Paul," I said, "Paul and Renée. They're leaving the château, leaving St. Gilles. They're going to travel, at any rate for six months or a year."

I saw him nod. "That will break up the marriage even sooner," he said. "Renée will find the lover she's been searching for, and Paul feel himself more inferior than ever. Put him in the world and he'll look what he knows he is—a provincial boor. What want of tact, if I may say so, how lacking in finesse. Tell me more."

I remembered, as a boy, playing skittles. One bowled a ball along an alley, and the ninepin at the other end toppled and fell flat. This was what he was doing now to the plans I had conceived through love.

"You turned down the Carvalet contract, didn't you?" I said. "I signed a new one. The *verrerie* won't close. No one will be out of a job. You'll have to back the loss with capital."

This time he didn't laugh. He whistled. The expression of dismay delighted me.

"I suppose I can get out of it," he said. "It may take time. Your other moves were minor blunders, but this is serious. Even with Françoise's money, propping up a dying business is no fun. Whom did you intend to look after things, with Paul away?"

"Blanche," I said.

"You actually spoke to Blanche?" he asked. "And she replied?"

"I did," I said. "She came down here this morning. I told her the *verrerie* was hers from now on. She can do what she likes with it, she can build it up as a dowry for Marie-Noël."

He said nothing for a moment. The upsetting of all his preconceived ideas may have shaken him. I hoped it had. More than anything else, I wanted him to lose assurance. He did not do so.

"Do you know," he said slowly, "it might, in the long run, work. If Blanche took up designing again, and we could turn out cheap gimcrack stuff to attract the tourist, we might develop a market in this

part of the country that would undercut everyone else. How clever of you to flatter her ego, which I suppose you did.

"You haven't done too badly, on the whole," he went on, after a moment. "What about Marie-Noel? Has she seen any visions this week, or dreamt any dreams?"

I did not answer. To tarnish the child was surely the ultimate evil. He might desecrate the mother, mock the sister and the brother, but to give him Marie-Noel as a butt for humour, that I would not do. "She's all right," I said. "She stood yesterday's tragedy well."

"That doesn't surprise me," he said. "The two of them never got on. Françoise was jealous of the child, and the child knew it. Now, at least, you understand what it means to have a possessive family. And you were prepared to endure it, for the sake of money. You came down here to the master's house determined to kill me, so you could live in comfort for the rest of your days."

He tilted his chair back again, blowing smoke into the air.

"You won't believe me," I said, "but I didn't think about the money. I happen to love your family, that's all."

My statement made him laugh once more. "You have the audacity to tell me," he said, "that you love my mother, who is without exception the most egotistical, the most rapacious woman I have ever known; you love Paul, who is an oaf and a weakling; you love Renée, who has a mind like an empty box; you love Blanche, who is so twisted with frustrated passion that the only stimulation she gets out of life is to kneel before a crucifix. And I suppose you'll tell me that you love my child for her sweetness and innocence, which, let me tell you, can be put on for effect."

I did not argue. What he said was true, according to his light, and perhaps mine too. It did not matter.

"I agree with you," I said, "your family are all those things. It doesn't prevent me from loving them, that's all. Don't ask me why. I couldn't answer you."

"I have affection for them," he said, "because they happen to belong to me. But you have no reason. You've only known them a week. You're an incurable sentimentalist, of course. Did you see yourself as a saviour?"

"No. As a fool."

"That's honest, anyway. And what do you suppose is going to happen now?"

"I don't know. It's up to you."

He scratched his head with the butt of his revolver. I might have sprung at him then, but it wouldn't have worked.

"Exactly," he said. "I can carry through your programme if I choose. Or tear it up, depending on my mood. What about you? Shall we walk into the forest and dig a grave? No one would look for you. You'd simply disappear. It's happened to other people before now."

"If that's what you decide," I said, "then go ahead. I'm in your hands. Unless you prefer to throw me down the well."

I couldn't see him, but I could feel his smile.

"Have you raked up that one, too?" he said. "What a ferret you are. I thought the mud had settled years ago. Do you also love your image of Maurice Duval?"

"It's not much use," I said, "discussing Duval or your family. I have my own picture of them. Nothing you can say will break it down. If you intend to kill me, as I intended to kill you, let's get it over. I'm ready."

"I'm not sure I want to kill you," he said. "It seems rather a waste. After all, we've deceived them once, we could do so again. I could let you know, we could arrange a rendezvous, I could disappear for a week or a month and you take my place. What do you think? Of course, I might have undone, in the meantime, all that you'd tried to do. But that wouldn't bother you. It might even add zest to your stay."

I hated him so much I could not answer. And, taking my silence for consideration, he went on, "You'd hardly have met my Béla. There wouldn't have been time. She keeps a shop in Villars, cooks like an angel, and that's not her only attraction. I visit her now and again to keep boredom at bay. Naturally, if we come to an agreement, she'll be part of the bargain. It would even add a certain piquancy when I returned, if I thought you'd been deceiving Béla with the rest."

I got up from my chair. Instantly he rose too, covering me with the gun.

"Let's get it over," I said. "I've nothing more to say."



"I have, though," he answered. "Don't you want to know what I've been doing the past week?"

"No," I said. "Frankly, I don't care. It doesn't concern me."

"But it does," he insisted. "It concerns you very much."

"How?"

"Sit down again," he said, "and I'll enlighten you." He snapped on a cigarette lighter, which I realized, in the light of the flame, was mine. And then I saw that his coat was also mine. But not the one I had been wearing in Le Mans.

"You see?" he said. "I played the game fair, just as you did. If you were taking my place, it was only sporting to take yours. I went to London, to your flat. I only flew back today."

I stared at him, or rather at his shadow. When I had thought of him, during the past week, it had been as a shadow, a wraith. And had I given the wraith substance I should have placed him perhaps in Paris, or in Italy, in Spain, anywhere but in my own life, deceiving my own world.

"You went to my flat?" I said. "You used my things?"

"Why not?" he said. "That's what you did at St. Gilles. I left you my family. You used them in the way you've described. You can hardly blame me for playing the game in reverse."

I tried to think. The hall porters would merely nod and say good morning or good night. The woman who cleaned my flat never came until after half past ten, when I had already left. My friends believed me away on holiday. There was no reason for anyone to telephone, to write.

Bewildered, I still sought for proof that he was lying. "How did you know where to go?" I said. "How did you manage?"

"My poor idiot," he replied, "your card was in your valise, your notebook, your cheques, your keys, your passport—all the things I was likely to need. To take over your very retiring personality proved the easiest thing in the world. I enjoyed myself: after the turmoil of St. Gilles I felt I was in paradise. I rifled your drawers, read your letters, deciphered your lecture notes, cashed your cheques—fortunately your somewhat cramped signature was easy enough to imitate. I spent five days in complete and utter idleness, which was just what I needed."

The humour, and the justice, struck me at last. I had played about with human life; he had not. I had done my best to change his household; he had merely yawned and taken his ease. Then I remembered that he had, after all, returned to France; for he had read the news of Françoise's death in the papers at Deauville.

"If you enjoyed my London solitude so much," I asked, "what made you come back again to France?"

I felt him watch me in the darkness. He did not answer immediately, and when he did it was almost with embarrassment.

"That's where I have to apologize," he said, "but not more so, I think, than you, who by altering that contract may have let me in for very heavy loss. The fact is"—he paused, choosing his words—"the fact is, five days in London were enough. I couldn't have continued your dull, virtuous existence. In time, friends would have written, people at the university got in touch; and though I have never questioned either my ability to take another's part or my command of English—I had plenty of practice in both during the war—I appear to have lacked your supreme confidence. The easiest thing to do, as I intended using your name and personality, was to change your mode of living. This was, to tell you the truth, just what I did."

I did not understand what he was trying to tell me. "What do you mean?" I said. "How could you change my life?"

I heard him sigh in the darkness. "It may come as a shock," he said, "just as what you have been doing at St. Gilles has come as a shock to me. First I wrote to the university, resigning your job. Then I told your landlord that I was going abroad immediately and wanted to give up the lease of your flat, and, flats being as few and far between in London as they are in Paris, he was only too glad for me—or rather you—to get out at once. I instructed a firm of auctioneers to sell your furniture. And finally, having found out from your bank statement how much money you had in the bank, I cashed a cheque for just that amount. It was, if you remember, a couple of hundred pounds. Not a fortune, but enough to tide me over comfortably for a month or two, until something else turned up."

I tried to grasp what he was telling me, to make myself realize that he was speaking of something which had actually happened, to think

myself back into the person I had been. But all I could see was this shadow, wearing my clothes, who within a number of hours had destroyed that person's life.

"The point is, my friend," he continued smoothly, "that if I don't kill you, and if you won't agree to my little plan of deception that we share each other's lives from time to time, what are you going to do? There is *no* future for you."

The full meaning of his words was forced upon me. Unless I made a fool of myself by writing to the university and saying it was all a mistake, I had no work. I had no money, save for one or two modest investments. I had no flat, and if I didn't get back to London soon I should have no furniture. I did not exist.

"Of course," he said, "I didn't intend to come home. I was going to amuse myself spending your money over here. I had in mind, to start off with, some little niche in Sicily or Greece, taking Béla with me as a companion. She might have palled in time, but not at first: Hungarian women have the strangest charm. But now"—he broke off, and I could dimly see the shrug of the shoulders—"poor Françoise dying has rather changed my plans. Instead of being an impoverished provincial count I might, with any luck, be a millionaire. Fate, or whoever arranges these things, has done what I wanted."

He stood up, the gun still pointing at me.

"It's a curious thing," he said, "and shows weakness of character. But while I was driving from Deauville this afternoon I felt myself moved. This is, after all, my country, and where I belong. The château, heaven knows, is falling to pieces and the grounds are unkempt and ragged, but if you've been born in a place it does something to you. I neglect it, and curse it, and fight against all it does to me, just as I curse my mother, for the selfsame reason. And yet"—he laughed, and I saw him gesture with his hand—"and yet, in a strange sort of way I missed her, while I was gone. She's a devil and a brute, but I understand her and she understands me, and that's more than you can say, after your seven days."

Suddenly, with geniality, almost with affection, he shook my shoulder.

"Come on," he said, "I don't want to kill you. In many ways I'm

grateful for what you've done." He pulled out a wallet—mine. "This will keep you for some considerable time," he said. "And any time you decide upon deception, for a few days even, I'll be delighted to oblige. What about it? Shall we play charades again now, and start to strip?"

I thought of the curé. He was now back in St. Gilles, putting away his bicycle. At the château they were waiting for dinner. They would be wondering where I had gone. Marie-Noël, anxious perhaps at my absence, was waiting for me on the terrace. I began to take off my coat.

The exchange in the darkness was macabre, even terrible. It meant, with every garment shed, a loss of the self I had found. When I stood in front of him at last, naked, his revolver pointing at me still, I said, "Finish me off, I don't want to live."

"Nonsense," he answered. "No one refuses life. Besides, I don't want to kill you. The point has gone."

He began throwing off his clothes as he spoke, and seeing that I fumbled with them as I put them on, he said, "What have you done to your hand?"

"I burnt it," I said. "I burnt it in a bonfire."

"How careless," he said. "Does it mean you're not able to drive?"

"No," I said. "It's better now."

"You'd better hand over the dressing, I can't appear without it."

The clothes, that had once been mine, seemed shrunken, small. As I stood before him, dressed and ready, it was like wearing some sort of garment long outgrown, almost as if a man struggled once again into his schoolboy clothes.

"That's better," he said. "I feel like myself again." He moved towards the window. "We'd better go out this way," he said. "It's safer. That gossip Julie may be in her lodge. There's another wicked old rascal for you. I suppose you loved her too."

He climbed from the window and I followed him. The scent of the tumbled orchard filled the air.

"I'm sorry," he said, "I shall have to ask you to walk in front of me. I'll direct you to the place where I've left your car."

The dark woods closed upon us, and even now I could not be sure, even now it might suit his plan to kill me and have done with me for

ever. I walked on, through darkness, undergrowth and moss, and now the self who stumbled had no heart or mind.

"There's the car," he said suddenly.

The Ford, familiar, spattered with mud, was drawn up beside the forest track. It seemed to me, like my clothes, a phase outgrown. I patted the hood with my hand.

"Get in and back her out into the track," he said.

We got in and drove along the path. We turned into the forest road and followed it to the top of the hill. Below us were the lights of the village, and the clock struck eight.

"It may not be easy," I said slowly. "They have become different. Your mother, I mean, and Blanche, and Paul, and Renée. Only the child is the same. The child hasn't changed."

He laughed. "Even if she had," he said, "she'd soon be mine again. I'm the only one who matters in her world."

We drove down the lime avenue and across the bridge. When I came to the gateway I stopped the car. "I won't go any farther," I said. "It wouldn't be safe."

He got out and stood for a moment, an animal, sniffing the air. "It's good," he said. "It's part of the place. It's St. Gilles." Now at last he emptied his gun and put it, with the cartridges, into his pocket.

"Good luck," he said, and then, with a smile, "Listen." He put two fingers in his mouth and whistled. The sound was shrill and long. It was answered almost instantly by César. He began to bark. Not savagely, not as he would to a stranger, but excitedly, the bark changing to a howl, to a whine. The sound went on and on, filling the air. "You didn't learn that trick?" he asked. "Of course not, how could you know?"

He smiled, and waved his hand, and passed through the gateway on to the drive.

Looking towards the terrace steps, I saw a figure waiting there, the glow from the fanlight above the door shining upon her. It was Marie-Noël. When she saw the figure striding up the drive she gave a cry and ran down the steps towards him. I saw him swing her up in his arms and climb the steps. They went inside the château. The dog was whining still. I got into the car and drove away.

WHAT I did was automatic. I don't remember thinking anything. I turned the car up the lime avenue and then on to the road to Villars. I concentrated on holding the wheel and watching the road, and the effort of doing so shut out thoughts of anything else. I made no image of the life I had left.



Coming into Villars was a strange relief. The country roads held menace: they were nerve cells leading back to St. Gilles. Villars was lighted and had solidity, and people strolling in the streets. I turned down past the market place and stopped the car just short of the Porte de Ville. I looked across the canal and saw that the long window of Béla's room was opened wide, and lighted too. Something stirred within me that had been frozen since Jean de Gué and I had changed clothes in darkness. The light in her window was consoling, kindly. It stood for reality, for things that were true. It was important to know the false from the true, and I could no longer distinguish between them. Béla could tell me, Béla would know.

I left the car, went over the footbridge to her balcony, and walked in through the open window. The room was empty, but I could hear her moving about in the kitchen. I stood there, waiting, and in a moment she was with me. She stood in the doorway, looking at me, and then she shut the door and came towards me.

"I didn't expect you," she said, "but it doesn't matter. If I'd known you were coming I would have waited dinner for you."

"I'm not hungry," I said. "I don't want anything."

"You look ill," she said. "Sit down, I'll get you a drink."

I sat in the deep chair. I did not know what I was going to say to her. She gave me cognac, and watched me while I drank. The cognac brought some sort of warmth to me, but the numbness remained. I felt the solidity of the arm of the chair under my hand, and it was safety.

"Have you been in the hospital chapel?" she said.

I stared at her. It took me a moment to realize what she meant. "No,"

I said, "no, I was there this morning." I paused. "Thank you for the porcelain. The child was pleased. She believed they were the old ones, mended. It was right of you to suggest that."

"Yes," she said, "I thought it better that way."

She looked at me with compassion. No doubt I seemed to her strained and queer. She must believe I was still shaken by Françoise's death. It might be better to let her think that. Yet I could not be sure. I wanted something for myself alone.

"I came," I said, "because I was not sure when I should see you again."

"I understand," she answered. "Naturally, the next few days, the next weeks, are going to be very hard for you."

The next days . . . the next weeks. They did not exist. It was not easy to tell her that.

She was still watching me. I saw her eyes fall on my clothes. She did not recognize the suit. The shirt, the tie, the socks, the shoes—she had never seen any of them before.

An odd silence seemed to come between us. I felt I must justify myself, give her some explanation. "I want to thank you," I said. "You've shown me great understanding all this past week. I'm very grateful to you."

Suddenly I saw comprehension come into her eyes, the flash of intuition that sweeps an adult hearing the confession of a child. In a moment she was kneeling by my side. "He has come back then?" she said. "The other one?" She put her hands on my shoulders. "I might have known it. He saw the notice in the papers. That brought him back."

Her words gave me such a sense of overpowering relief that all feeling of strain and tension went from me. It was like the stanching of a wound, the cessation of pain, the blotting out of fear. I put down the cognac and did something infantile and absurd. I laid my head on her shoulder and closed my eyes.

"Why you?" I asked. "Why you and nobody else? Why not the mother, why not the child?"

I felt her hands on my head, soothing, gentle. It was surrender, it was peace.

"I suppose I was not easy to deceive," she said. "I did not realize at first. It was not till later that I knew."

"What did I do?" I said.

She laughed, and the laugh was not mocking, or easy, or gay, but had a strange quality of warmth, of understanding.

"It was not what you did," she said, "but what you were. You have something that he doesn't possess. That's how I knew."

"What do I have?" I asked.

"You may call it *tendresse*," she said. "I don't know another word for it." Then abruptly she asked my name.

"John," I said. "We share even that. Shall I tell you what happened?"

"If you want to," she said. "I can guess a great deal. The past is done with, for both of you. The future is what matters."

"Yes," I said, "but not mine, theirs."

I knew with urgency, with conviction, that what I was saying was right and true. The old self of Le Mans was dead. The shadow of Jean de Gué had also vanished. In their place was something else that was born of feeling, that could not die, and it was like a flame, contained in the body's shell.

"I love them," I said. "I'm part of them now, for ever. That's what I want you to understand. I shall never see them again, but because of them I live."

"I understand," she said, "and it could be the same for them. Because of you they also live."

"If I could believe that," I said, "then nothing matters. But he's gone back to them. It will start all over again—the carelessness, the unhappiness, the pain. If that were to happen, I should want to hang myself on the nearest tree. I want them to be happy—not his sort of happiness, but the kind that is buried inside them, locked up, that I know is there. Béla, it exists, I've seen it, like a light or a hunger, waiting to be released." I stopped. "He's a devil," I said, "and they belong to him again."

"No," she said, "that's where you're wrong. He's not a devil. He's a human, ordinary man, just like yourself."

She rose and drew the curtains, and then came back to me again. "Remember, I know him," she said, "his weakness and his strength,



his good points and his bad. If he were a devil I should have left him long ago."

I wanted to believe her, but I could not be sure. Little by little I told her what I knew of the past. Yet as I talked, wishing to condemn him, it was as if it was the shadow I condemned, the man who had moved and spoken and acted in his place, and not Jean de Gué at all. "It's no use," I said at last. "I'm not describing the man you know."

"You are," she answered, "but you're describing yourself as well."

There was the fear. Which one of us was real? It struck me suddenly that if I should now look at myself in a mirror I should see no reflection.

"Béla," I said, "hold me. Tell me my name."

"You are John," she said, "you are John, who changed places with Jean de Gué. You lived his life for a week. You came here to my house and you entered my life as John, not as Jean de Gué. Is that reality for you? Does that help you to become yourself?"

I touched her hair and her face and her hands, and there was no falsity about her, no pretence.

"You've given something to all of us," she said, "to me, to his mother, to his sister, to his child. Just now I called it *tendresse*. Whatever it is, it can't be destroyed. It's taken root. It will go on growing. In the future we shall look for you in Jean, not for Jean in you." She smiled, and put her hands on my shoulders. "Do you realize I know nothing about you?" she said. "I don't know where you come from, or where you are going, or anything at all except that your name is John."

"There is no more to know," I said. "Let's leave it at that."

I looked at the window and the curtains she had drawn across it.

"Why did you draw the curtains?" I asked.

"It's a signal," she said. "He doesn't come in when they're drawn. It means I'm not alone."

The same thought, then, had come to both of us. Once he had dined, and said good night to the child, and left his mother in the tower-room alone, he might go down to the car once again, and drive from St. Gilles to Villars, as I had done. He belonged here, just as he did there. I got up from the chair.

She said, "What are you going to do?"

"Leave the house," I answered, "before he comes."

She looked at me thoughtfully. "I could leave the curtains drawn," she said.

I glanced at the window.

"Pull the curtains back when I've left the house," I said. "I'll go out through the street door."

She followed me out of the room to the passage beyond. "What about your hand? It has no dressing."

She went to the bathroom and fetched an oilskin packet. As she held my hand, and dressed it, I thought of Blanche, who had done the same for me in the morning, and I thought of the mother, whose hand had lain in mine throughout the night. I remembered, too, the firm, warm clasp of the child.

"Look after them," I said. "You can do it, but nobody else. Perhaps he'll listen to you. Help him to love them."

"He loves them already," she said. "I want you to believe it. It wasn't just the money that brought him back."

"I wonder," I said. "I wonder. . . ."

When she had dressed my hand she came with me down the stairs, and drew back the bolts from the door. "A week ago," I told her, "I was a man named John, who didn't know what to do with failure. I thought of a place I might go to, to find out. Then I met Jean de Gué, and the failure turned into love for St. Gilles. But the problem remains the same. What do I do with love?"

She opened the door. The shops and houses opposite were shuttered and closed. There was nobody in the street.

"You give it away," she said, "but the trouble is, it stays with you just the same. Like water in a well." She put her arms round me and kissed me. "Will you write to me?" she asked.

"I expect so."

"And you know where you're going?"

"I know where I'm going."

"If they could have shown you there what to do with failure, can they also show you what to do with love?"

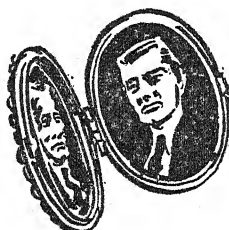
"I believe so. I believe they'll give me the answer you've given me now."

I kissed her, and then I went out into the street. I heard her shut the

door and bolt it behind me. I went under the Porte de Ville, and climbed into the car, and reached for my maps. I found the route I had marked with a blue cross a week ago, the road to the Abbey from Mortagne. I might be able to get there in not much more than an hour.

I put down the map, and glancing up at her window I saw that she had pulled the curtains back once more. The light was shining from the window down to the canal and the footbridge. I backed the car, and turned and went up the avenue, and as I passed the hospital I saw the Renault drawn up there. It was not outside the hospital entrance, but by the smaller gate, leading to the chapel. It was empty, and there was no sign of Gaston. Whoever had come in the car had gone in to pay tribute alone.

I drove to the network of roads at the top of the town, turned left, and took the road to Bellême and Mortagne.



*Daphne du Maurier*

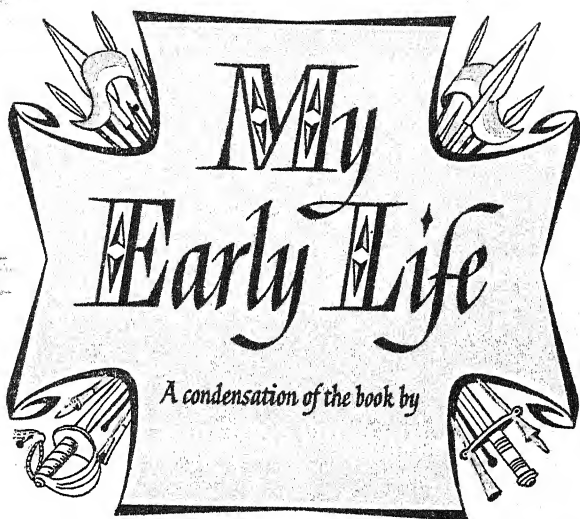


DAPHNE DU MAURIER was born into a distinguished literary and theatrical family (her grandfather wrote the still-popular *Trilby* and *Peter Ibbetson*, while her father was the famous actor, Sir Gerald du Maurier). She began to write almost as soon as she could hold a pen, and her first novel, *The Loving Spirit*, appeared in 1931, when she was in her early twenties. In 1938 *Rebecca* made her famous and, with her, the great manor house of Menabilly in Cornwall, where she lives and where three of her novels—including *My Cousin Rachel*, an earlier selection in these volumes—are laid.

Miss du Maurier is now one of the best-known and most successful authors in the world, and each new book from her is a major literary event. Fair and classically handsome, she is married to Lieut.-Gen. Sir Frederick ("Boy") Browning, Treasurer to the Duke of Edinburgh. The mother of three children, she has a full and happy domestic life; and when writing spends long secluded hours in a bare hut in the lovely grounds of Menabilly.



*Illustrations by Fred Middlehurst and Ed Vebell, portrait by John Wansley*



# My Early Life

*A condensation of the book by*



"GREAT FUN!" Thus Churchill sums up the first thirty-four years of his life, which he describes in this lively autobiography. Here is a picture of Churchill still unfamiliar to many people: of the young soldier of great enthusiasm and physical courage, who sought danger and adventure wherever they could be found. Risking his life countless times, he fought Pathan tribesmen in the hills of India and took part in one of the last full-scale cavalry engagements in history, the crushing battle of Omdurman. The story of his later escape from a prison camp during the Boer War ranks with the great literature of escape and pursuit.

This is a fascinating account of the forging of a character and temperament, and one which sheds a new and revealing light on the Churchill of later years.

"There are few who could play on all the strings—humour, headlong excitement, quiet irony, melancholy regret for vanished customs and glories, love of sport, the pleasures of friendship—with so sure a hand."—*The Times*



## CHAPTER 1

WHEN does one first begin to remember? When do the lights and shadows of dawning consciousness cast their print upon the mind of a child? My earliest memories are of Ireland. I can recall scenes and events in Ireland quite well, yet I left that country when I was just over four years old, in 1879. My father had gone to Ireland as secretary to his father, the Duke of Marlborough, appointed Lord Lieutenant by Mr. Disraeli in 1876.

I remember my grandfather, the old Duke, unveiling a statue in 1878. A great black crowd, scarlet soldiers on horseback, strings pulling away a brown shiny sheet, the formidable grandpapa, talking loudly to the crowd. I recall even a phrase he used: "and with a withering volley he shattered the enemy's line." I quite understood that he was speaking about war and fighting and that a "volley" meant what the soldiers used to do with loud bangs so often in the park where I was taken for my morning walks. This, I think, is my first coherent memory.

Other events stand out more distinctly. My nurse, Mrs. Everest, was nervous about the Irish Nationalists, the Fenians. I gathered these were wicked people and there was no end to what they would do if they had their way. On one occasion when I was out riding on my donkey, we thought we saw a long dark procession of Fenians approaching. I am sure now it must have been the Rifle Brigade out for a route march. But we were all very much alarmed, particularly the donkey, who expressed his anxiety by kicking. I was thrown off and had concussion of the brain. This was my first introduction to Irish politics!

My mother, the daughter of the American sportsman and patron of music, Leonard Jerome of New York, was at the time she met my father widely known in New York, Paris, and London society as one of the most beautiful girls of the day. Lord Randolph Churchill fell in love with her at first sight, and a few months later they were man and wife. My picture of her in Ireland is in a riding habit, fitting like a skin and often beautifully spotted with mud. She and my father hunted



continually on their large horses; and sometimes there were great scares because one or the other did not come back for many hours after they were expected.

My mother always seemed to me a fairy princess: a radiant being, possessed of limitless riches and power. She shone for me like the evening star. I loved her dearly—but at a distance. My nurse was my confidante. Mrs. Everest it was who looked after me and tended all my wants. It was to her I poured out my many troubles, both now and in my school-days.

I was first menaced with Education with the arrival of a sinister figure described as “the Governess.” In order to prepare for her arrival, Mrs. Everest produced a book called *Reading without Tears*. It certainly did not justify its title in my case. We toiled each day. My nurse pointed with a pen at the different letters. I thought it all very tiresome. When the fateful hour struck and the Governess arrived, I did what so many oppressed peoples have done in similar circumstances: I took to the woods. I hid in the extensive shrubberies—forests they seemed—which surrounded our house. Hours passed before I was retrieved and handed over to “the Governess.”

We continued to toil every day, not only at letters but at words, and also at what was much worse, figures. Letters after all stood together in a certain way one recognized and that meant a word which one uttered when pressed sufficiently. But the figures were tied into all sorts of tangles and did things to one another which it was extremely difficult to forecast with complete accuracy. The Governess apparently attached enormous importance to the answer being exact. It was not any use being “nearly right.” In some cases these figures got into debt with one another: you had to borrow one or carry one, and afterwards you had to pay back the one you had borrowed. These complications cast a steadily gathering shadow over my daily life. They took one away from all the interesting things one wanted to do in the nursery or in the garden. They made increasing inroads upon one’s leisure.

But soon, however, a much worse peril began to threaten. I was to go to school. I was now seven years old, and I was what grown-up people in their off-hand way called “a troublesome boy.” I was to go away from home for many weeks at a stretch in order to do lessons under

masters. Although much that I had heard about school had made a disagreeable impression on my mind, an impression thoroughly borne out by the actual experience, I was also agitated by this great change in my life. I thought in spite of the lessons, it would be fun living with so many other boys, and that we should have great adventures. Also I was told that "school-days were the happiest time in one's life." All the boys enjoyed them. Some of my cousins who were a little older had been quite sorry—I was told—to come home for the holidays. Cross-examined the cousins did not confirm this; they only grinned.

It was very interesting buying all the things one had to have for going to school. No less than fourteen pairs of socks were on the list. Mrs. Everest thought this was very extravagant. She said that with care ten pairs would do quite well. Still it was a good thing to have some to spare, as one could then make sure of avoiding the very great dangers inseparable from "sitting in wet feet."

The school my parents had selected for my education was one of the most fashionable and expensive in the country. It modelled itself upon Eton and aimed at being preparatory for that school. It was supposed to be the very last thing in schools. Only ten boys in a class; electric light (then a wonder); a swimming-pond; spacious football and cricket grounds.

It was a dark November afternoon when we arrived at this establishment. We had tea with the Headmaster, with whom my mother conversed in the most easy manner. I was preoccupied with the fear of spilling my cup and so making "a bad start."

When the last sound of my mother's departing wheels had died away, I was taken into a Form Room and told to sit at a desk. All the other boys were out of doors, and I was alone with the Form Master. He produced a thin greeny-brown covered book filled with words in different types of print.

"This is a Latin grammar." He opened it at a well-thumbed page. "You must learn this," he said, pointing to a number of words in a frame of lines. "I will come back in half an hour and see what you know."

Behold me then on a gloomy evening, with an aching heart, seated in front of the declension of *mensa*.

Mensa	a table
Mensa	O table
Mensam	a table
Mensae	of a table
Mensae	to or for a table
Mensa	by, with or from a table

What on earth did it mean? Where was the sense of it? It seemed absolute rigmarole to me. However, there was one thing I could always do: I could learn by heart.

In due course the Master returned.

"Have you learned it?" he asked.

"I think I can say it, sir," I replied; and I gabbled it off.

He seemed so satisfied with this that I was emboldened to ask a question.

"What does it mean, sir?"

"It means what it says. *Mensa*, a table. You have learned the singular of the First Declension."

"Then why does *mensa* also mean O table," I inquired, "and what does O table mean?"

"*Mensa*, O table, is the vocative case," he replied. "You would use that in addressing a table." And then seeing he was not carrying me with him, "You would use it in speaking to a table."

"But I never do," I blurted out in honest amazement.

"If you are impertinent, you will be punished, and punished, let me tell you, very severely," was his conclusive rejoinder.

Such was my first introduction to the classics from which, I have been told, many of our cleverest men have derived so much solace and profit.

Flogging with the birch in accordance with the Eton fashion was a great feature in the school's curriculum. Two or three times a month the whole school was marshalled in the library, and one or more delinquents were haled off to an adjoining apartment and there flogged until they bled freely, while the rest sat quaking, listening to their screams. How I hated this school, and what a life of anxiety I lived there for more than two years. I made very little progress at my lessons, and none at all at games. I counted the days and the hours to the end

of every term, when I should return home from this hateful servitude and range my soldiers in line of battle on the nursery floor. The greatest pleasure I had in those days was reading. When I was nine and a half my father gave me *Treasure Island*, and I remember the delight with which I devoured it. My teachers saw me at once backward and precocious, reading books beyond my years and yet at the bottom of the Form. Where my reason, imagination or interest were not engaged, I would not or I could not learn. In all the twelve years I was at school no one ever succeeded in making me write a Latin verse or learn any Greek except the alphabet. I do not at all excuse myself for this foolish neglect of opportunities. Perhaps if I had been introduced to the ancients through their history and customs, instead of through their grammar and syntax, I might have had a better record.

I fell into a low state of health at St. James's School, and finally after a serious illness my parents took me away. Our family doctor then practised at Brighton; in order that I should be under his constant care, I was transferred to a school at Brighton kept by two ladies. This was a smaller school than the one I had left. Here there was an element of kindness and of sympathy. At this school I was allowed to learn things which interested me: French, history, lots of poetry by heart, and above all riding and swimming. The impression of those years makes a pleasant picture in my mind, in strong contrast to my earlier school-day memories.

I HAD scarcely passed my twelfth birthday when I entered the inhospitable regions of examinations. The subjects which were dearest to the examiners were almost invariably those I fancied least. I would have liked to have been examined in history, poetry and writing essays. The examiners, on the other hand, were partial to Latin and mathematics. And their will prevailed. Moreover, I should have liked to be asked to say what I knew. They always tried to ask what I did not know. When I would have willingly displayed my knowledge, they sought to expose my ignorance. This sort of treatment had only one result: I did not do well in examinations.

This was especially true of my entrance examinations to Harrow. The Headmaster, however, took a broad-minded view of my Latin

prose. I was found unable to answer a single question in the Latin paper. I wrote my name at the top of the page. I wrote down the number of the question "1." After much reflection I put a bracket round it thus "[1]." But thereafter I could not think of anything connected with it that was either relevant or true. I gazed for two whole hours at this sad spectacle; and then merciful ushers collected my piece of foolscap. It was from these slender indications of scholarship that Mr. Welldon drew the conclusion that I was worthy to pass into Harrow. It is very much to his credit. It showed that he was a man capable of looking beneath the surface of things: a man not dependent upon paper manifestations. I have always had the greatest regard for him.

In consequence of his decision, I was in due course placed in the lowest division of the bottom form. My name was in fact only two from the bottom of the whole school; and these two, I regret to say, disappeared almost immediately through illness or some other cause.

I continued in this unpretentious situation for nearly a year. However, by being so long in the lowest form I gained an immense advantage over the clever boys. They all went on to learn Latin and Greek and splendid things like that. But I was considered such a dunce that I could learn only English. Thus I got into my bones the essential structure of the ordinary British sentence—which is a noble thing. And when in after years my schoolfellows who had won prizes and distinction for writing such beautiful Latin poetry and pithy Greek epigrams had to come down again to common English, to earn their living or make their way, I did not feel myself at any disadvantage. Naturally I am biased in favour of boys learning English. I would make them all learn English: and then I would let the clever ones learn Latin as an honour, and Greek as a treat. But the only thing I would whip them for would be for not knowing English.

It was thought incongruous that while I apparently stagnated in the lowest form, I should gain a prize open to the whole school for reciting twelve hundred lines of Macaulay's "Lays of Ancient Rome" without making a single mistake. I also succeeded in passing the preliminary examination for the army while still almost at the bottom of the school. This examination seemed to have called forth a very special effort on my part, for many boys far above me failed in it. I also had a piece of

good luck. We knew that among other questions we should be asked to draw from memory a map of some country or other. The night before by way of final preparation I put the names of all the maps in the atlas into a hat and drew out New Zealand. I applied my good memory to the geography of that Dominion. Sure enough the first question in the paper was: "Draw a map of New Zealand."

I was now embarked on a military career. This choice was entirely due to my collection of soldiers. I had nearly fifteen hundred, organized as an infantry division with a cavalry brigade. My brother Jack commanded the hostile army. But by a treaty he was not allowed to have artillery. Very important!

The day came when my father himself paid a formal visit of inspection. All the troops were arranged in the correct formation of attack. He spent twenty minutes studying the scene with a keen eye and captivating smile. At the end he asked me if I would like to go into the army. I thought it would be splendid to command an army, so I said "Yes" at once: and immediately I was taken at my word. For years I thought my father had discerned in me the qualities of military genius. But I was told later that he had only come to the conclusion that I was not clever enough to go to the Bar. However that may be, the toy soldiers turned the current of my life. Henceforward all my education was directed to passing into Sandhurst, and afterwards to the technical details of the profession of arms. Anything else I had to pick up for myself.

I SPENT nearly four and a half years at Harrow, of which three were in the Army Class. Meanwhile I found an admirable method of learning my Latin translations. I was always very slow at using a dictionary: it was just like using a telephone directory. It is easy to open it more or less at the right letter, but then you have to turn backward and forward and peer up and down the columns and very often find yourself three or four pages the wrong side of the word you want. In short I found it most laborious. But now I formed an alliance with a boy in the sixth form. He was very clever and could read Latin as easily as English. My daily task was perhaps ten or fifteen lines of Latin. This would ordinarily have taken me an hour or an hour and a half to decipher, and

then it would probably have been wrong. But my friend could in five minutes construe it for me word by word, and once I had seen it exposed, I remembered it firmly. My friend for his part was almost as much troubled by the English essays he had to write as I was by these Latin crossword puzzles. We agreed together that he should tell me my Latin translations and that I should do his essays. The arrangement worked admirably. The Latin master seemed quite satisfied with my work, and I had more time to myself in the mornings.

I will here make some general observations about Latin and Greek that nobody ever taught me at school. In a sensible language like English important words are connected and related to one another by other little words. The Romans in that stern antiquity considered such a method weak and unworthy. Nothing would satisfy them but that the structure of every word should be reacted on by its neighbours in accordance with elaborate rules to meet the different conditions in which it might be used. There is no doubt that this method both sounds and looks more impressive than our own. The sentence fits together like a piece of polished machinery. Every phrase can be tensely charged with meaning. It must have been very laborious, even if you were brought up to it; but it gave the Romans, and the Greeks too, a fine and easy way of establishing their posthumous fame. When they arrived at fairly obvious reflections upon life and love, upon war, fate or manners, they coined them into the slogans or epigrams for which their language was so well adapted, and thus preserved the patent rights for all time. Hence their reputation.

BEFORE I was able to pass into Sandhurst, I met with a very serious accident.

My aunt, Lady Wimborne, had lent us her comfortable estate at Bournemouth for the winter. It was a wild place and through the middle there fell to the sea level a deep cleft called a chine. Across this chine a rustic bridge nearly fifty yards long had been thrown. I was just eighteen and on my holidays. My younger brother aged twelve, and a cousin aged fourteen, proposed to chase me. After I had been hunted for twenty minutes and was rather short of breath, I decided to cross the bridge. Arrived at its centre I saw to my consternation that the





pursuers had divided their forces. One stood at each end of the bridge; capture seemed certain. But in a flash there came across me a great project. The chine which the bridge spanned was full of young fir trees. Their slender tops reached to the level of the footway. "Would it not," I asked myself, "be possible to leap on to one of them and slip down the pole-like stem, breaking off each tier of branches as one descended, until the fall was broken?" I looked at it, I computed it, I meditated. Meanwhile I climbed over the balustrade. My young pursuers stood wonder-struck at either end of the bridge. To plunge or not to plunge,



that was the question! In a second I had plunged, throwing out my arms to embrace the summit of the fir tree. The argument was correct; the data were absolutely wrong. The measured fall was twenty-nine feet on to hard ground. It was three days before I regained consciousness and more than three months before I crawled from my bed. For a year I looked at life round a corner.

It is to the surgeon's art and to my own pronounced will-to-live that the reader is indebted for this story.

My slow recovery from this accident added to my difficulties with final examinations; nevertheless I qualified at last for a cavalry cadetship at Sandhurst. I rejoiced at going to Sandhurst, and at the prospect of becoming a real live cavalry officer in no more than eighteen months: and I busied myself in ordering the considerable necessary outfit of a gentleman-cadet.

Up to this time I had been on the whole considerably discouraged by my school-days, during the whole of which I had enjoyed few gleams of success. I had hardly ever been asked to learn anything which seemed of the slightest use or interest.

In retrospect these years form the only barren and unhappy period of my life. I was happy as a child with my toys in my nursery. I have been happier every year since I became a man. But this interlude of school makes a sombre grey patch upon the chart of my journey. It was an unending spell of worries that did not then seem petty, and of toil uncheered by fruition; a time of discomfort, restriction and purposeless monotony.

Except in fencing, in which I had won the Public School Championship, I had achieved no distinction in nearly twelve years of school. All my contemporaries and even younger boys seemed in every way better adapted to the conditions of our little world. They were far better both at the games and at the lessons. It is not pleasant to feel oneself so completely outclassed and left behind at the very beginning of the race. I had been surprised on taking leave of the Headmaster of Harrow to hear him predict, with a confidence for which I could see no foundation, that I should be able to make my way all right. I have always been very grateful to him for this.

## CHAPTER 2

AT SANDHURST I had a new start. I was no longer handicapped by past neglect of Latin, French or mathematics. We had now to learn fresh things and we all started equal. Tactics, Fortification, Topography, Military Law and Military Administration, Drill, Gymnastics and Riding formed the whole curriculum. For the first time I was deeply interested in my work, although I did not much like the drill and indeed figured for several months in the "Awkward Squad," formed from those who required special smartening up.

At Sandhurst, our minds were not allowed to roam in working hours beyond a subaltern's range of vision. We dug trenches, constructed breastworks, and made fougasses (a kind of primitive land mine). We cut railway lines, and learned how to blow up masonry bridges, or make substitutes out of pontoons or timber. We drew contour maps of all the hills round Camberley, made road reconnaissances in every direction, and set out picket lines and paper plans for advanced guards or rear guards, and even did some very simple tactical schemes.

But sometimes I was invited to dine at the Staff College, less than a mile away, where all the cleverest officers in the army were being trained for the High Command. Here the study was of divisions, army corps and even whole armies. This was thrilling. It did seem such a pity that it all had to be make-believe, and that the age of wars between civilized nations had come to an end for ever. If it had only been a hundred years earlier what splendid times we should have had! Fancy being nineteen in 1793 with more than twenty years of war against Napoleon in front of one! However, all that was finished. In my boyish view the world was growing so sensible and pacific—and so democratic, too—that the great days were over.

Horses were the greatest of my pleasures at Sandhurst. I and the group in which I moved spent all our money on hiring horses. We organized point-to-point races and even a steeplechase in the park of a friendly grandee and bucketed gaily about the countryside. And here I say to parents, especially, to wealthy parents, "Don't give your son money. As far as you can afford it, give him horses." No one ever came

to grief—except honourable grief—through riding horses. No hour of life is lost that is spent in the saddle. Young men have often been ruined through owning horses, or through backing horses, but never through riding them; unless, of course, they break their necks, which, taken at a gallop, is a very good death to die.

I learned several things at Sandhurst which showed me how to behave and how officers of different ranks were expected to treat one another in the life and discipline of a regiment. My company commander, Major Ball, of the Welch Regiment, was a very strict and peppery martinet. Formal, reserved, frigidly courteous, punctilious, impeccable, severe, he was held in the greatest awe. It had never been his fortune to go on active service, but we were none the less sure that he would have had to be killed to be beaten.

The rule was, that if you went outside the college bounds, you first of all wrote your name in the company leave-book, and might then assume that your request was sanctioned. One day I drove a tandem over to Aldershot to see a friend in a militia battalion then training there. On my way, whom should I meet but Major Ball himself driving a spanking dog-cart home to Sandhurst. As I took off my hat to him, I remembered with a flash of anxiety that I had been too lazy or careless to write my name in the leave-book. However, I thought, "there is still a chance. He may not look at it until Mess; and I will write my name down as soon as I get back." I curtailed my visit to the militia battalion and hastened back to the college as fast as the ponies could trot. It was six o'clock when I got in. I ran along the passage to the desk where the leave-book lay, and the first thing that caught my eyes was the Major's initials at the foot of the leaves granted for the day. I was too late. He had seen me in Aldershot and had seen that my name was not in the book. Then I looked again, and there to my astonishment was my own name written in the Major's handwriting and duly approved by his initials.

This opened my eyes to the kind of life which existed in the old British army and how the very strictest discipline could be maintained among officers without the slightest departure from the standards of a courteous and easy society. Naturally, after such a rebuke I never was so neglectful again.

My course at Sandhurst soon came to an end. I passed out with honours eighth in my batch of a hundred and fifty. I mention this because it shows that I could learn quickly enough the things that mattered. It had been a hard but happy experience. In December 1894, I returned home fully qualified to receive the Queen's commission.

I passed out of Sandhurst into the world. It opened like Aladdin's Cave. From the beginning of 1895 down to the present time of writing I have never had time to turn round. I could count almost on my fingers the days when I have had nothing to do. An endless moving picture in which one was an actor. On the whole great fun! But the years 1895 to 1900 which are the staple of this story exceed in vividness, variety and exertion anything I have known—except, of course, the opening months of the Great War.

Come on now, all you young men, all over the world. Twenty to twenty-five! These are the years! You have not an hour to lose. You must take your places in Life's fighting line. Don't be content with things as they are. Enter your inheritance, accept your responsibilities. You will make all kinds of mistakes; but as long as you are generous and true, and also fierce, you cannot hurt the world or even seriously distress her. She was made to be wooed and won by youth. She has lived and thrived only by repeated subjugations.

MY FATHER died in 1895. All my dreams of comradeship with him, of entering Parliament at his side and in his support, were ended.

Lord Randolph Churchill's place in our political history is measured by the intense impression which his personality made upon his contemporaries. He embodied that force, caprice and charm which so often springs from genius.

Now when I read over all the letters which he wrote to me laboriously with his own hand after the fashion of those days, I feel that I did not at the time appreciate how much he thought and cared for me. More than ever do I regret that we did not live long enough in company to know each other.

There remained for me only to pursue his aims. I was now in the main the master of my fortunes. My mother was always at hand to help and advise; but I was now in my twenty-first year and she never

sought to exercise parental control. Indeed she became an ardent ally, furthering my plans and guarding my interest with all her influence and boundless energy. She was still at forty young, beautiful and fascinating. We worked together on even terms, more like brother and sister than mother and son. And so it continued to the end.

IN MARCH 1895 I was gazetted to the 4th Hussars, and began the arduous training of a Recruit Officer. The 4th Hussars exceeded in severity anything I had previously experienced in military equitation.

Every day long hours were passed in the Riding School, at Stables or on the Barrack Square. In those days the newly joined officer was given a recruit's training for the first six months. He rode and drilled afoot with the troopers and received exactly the same instruction and training as they did. At every exercise he had to try to set an example to the men. This was a task not always possible to discharge with conspicuous success. Mounting and dismounting from a bare-backed horse at the trot or canter; jumping a high bar without stirrups or even saddle, sometimes with hands clasped behind one's back, brought their inevitable share of mishaps. Many a time did I pick myself up shaken and sore and don again my little gold-braided pork-pie cap, fastened on the chin by a boot-lace strap, with what appearance of dignity I could command, while twenty recruits grinned furtively but delightedly to see their officer suffering the same misfortunes which it was their lot so frequently to undergo.

Within measure, I am all for youth being made willingly to endure austerities; and for the rest it was a gay and lordly life that now opened upon me. There is a thrill and charm of its own in the glittering jingle of a cavalry squadron manœuvring at the trot; and this deepens into joyous excitement when the same evolutions are performed at a gallop. The stir of the horses, the clank of their equipment, the thrill of motion, the tossing plumes, the sense of incorporation in a living machine, the suave dignity of the uniform—all combine to make cavalry drill a fine thing in itself.

It is a shame that War should have flung all this aside in its greedy, base, opportunist march, and should turn instead to chemists in spectacles and chauffeurs pulling the levers of aeroplanes or machine-guns.

War, which used to be cruel and magnificent, has now become cruel and squalid. But at Aldershot in 1895 none of these horrors had broken upon mankind.

It was a very fine thing in the '90's to see the Inspector-General manœuvre a cavalry division of thirty or forty squadrons as if it were one single unit. When this massive and splendid array was ordered to change front through an angle of perhaps fifteen degrees, the outside brigade had to gallop two miles in a cloud of dust so thick that you could not see even five yards before your face, and twenty falls and half a dozen accidents were the features of a morning's drill. And when the line was finally formed and the regiment or brigade was committed to the charge, one could hardly help shouting in joyous wrath.

Afterwards, when we were home in barracks, these enthusiasms in my case were corrected by remembering that the Germans had twenty cavalry divisions each as imposing as this our only darling; and by wondering what would happen if half a dozen spoil-sports got themselves entrenched with a Maxim gun.

Then there were splendid parades when Queen Victoria sat in her carriage at the saluting point and when the whole Aldershot garrison, perhaps twenty-five thousand strong, blue and gold, scarlet and steel, passed before her. I wondered why our statesmen did not arrange an international convention whereby all the European Powers—France, Germany, Austria and Russia—should be represented in case of war, just as they are at the Olympic Games, by equal teams which should embody all that was best in the race, and so settle the sovereignty of the world. However, the Victorian ministers were very unenterprising; they missed their chance; they simply let War pass out of the hands of the experts and properly trained persons, and reduced it to a mere disgusting matter of Men, Money and Machinery.

Certainly no officer in the Aldershot Command in 1895 would have believed that our little army would again be sent to Europe. Yet there was to come a day when a cavalry captain—Haig by name—who drilled with us in the Long Valley this spring was to feel himself stunted because in a most important battle, he could marshal no more than six hundred thousand men—and could only support them by less than four hundred brigades of artillery.

I wonder often whether any other generation has seen such astounding revolutions of data and values as those through which we have lived. Scarcely anything material or established which I was brought up to believe was permanent and vital has lasted. Everything I was sure was impossible has happened.

At this time I heard that my old nurse, Mrs. Everest, was seriously ill, and I travelled up to London to see her. She knew she was in danger, but her only anxiety was for me. There had been a heavy shower of rain. My jacket was wet. When she felt it with her hands she was greatly alarmed for fear I should catch cold. The jacket had to be taken off and thoroughly dried before she was calm again.

I had to return to Aldershot by the midnight train for a very early morning parade. As soon as it was over, I returned to her bedside. She still knew me, but she gradually became unconscious. Death came very easily to her. She had lived such an innocent and loving life of service to others and held such a simple faith, that she had no fears at all, and did not seem to mind very much. She had been my dearest and most intimate friend during the whole of the twenty years I had lived. I now telegraphed to the clergyman with whom she had served nearly a quarter of a century before. He had a long memory for faithful service. We met at the graveside.

When I think of the fate of poor old women, so many of whom have no one to look after them and nothing to live on at the end of their lives, I am glad to have had a hand in all that structure of pensions and insurance which is especially a help to them.

### CHAPTER 3

IN THE spring of 1896 the 4th Hussars prepared to sail for garrison duty in India. We yielded up our horses to some home-coming regiment, so that all cavalry training came to an end. The regiment would remain in the East for twelve or fourteen years, and officers were given the fullest leave and facilities for arranging their affairs.

I now passed a most agreeable six months; in fact they formed almost the only idle spell I have ever had. We played polo at Hurlingham



and Ranelagh. I had now five quite good ponies, and was considered to show promise. I gave myself over to the amusements of the London Season. In those days English Society was a brilliant and powerful body, with standards of conduct and methods of enforcing them now altogether forgotten. In a very large degree everyone knew everyone else and who he was. The few hundred great families, who had governed England for so many generations and had seen her rise to the pinnacle of her glory, were interrelated to an enormous extent by marriage. Everywhere one met friends and kinsfolk. The leading figures of society were in many cases the leading statesmen in Parliament, and also the leading sportsmen on the turf. Lord Salisbury was accustomed scrupulously to avoid calling a Cabinet when there was racing at Newmarket, and the House of Commons made a practice of adjourning for the Derby. I moved from one delightful company and scene to another, and passed the week-ends in those beautiful places and palaces which were then linked by their actual owners with the long triumphant history of the United Kingdom. I am glad to have seen, if only for a few months, this vanished world.

I sustained one disturbing experience during this holiday. I was invited, and it was a great honour for a second lieutenant, to join a week-end party given to the Prince of Wales. I realized that I must be upon my best behaviour—punctual, subdued, reserved—in short, that I must display all the qualities with which I am least endowed. I ought to have caught a six o'clock train to Dorking; but I decided to travel by the seven-fifteen instead. This was running things very fine, but all might have been well had the train not been half an hour late. I realized that I should be almost certainly late for dinner. So I proceeded, much to the concern of the gentleman who shared my carriage, to dress in the train between the stations. At Dorking I nipped out of the carriage, jumped into the brougham and saw by the speed at which the two horses were being urged that a serious crisis awaited me. However, I thought, "I will slip in and take my place almost unnoticed at the table, and make my apologies afterwards."

When I arrived the entire company was assembled in the drawing-room. The party it seemed without me would be only thirteen. The prejudice of the Royal Family against sitting down thirteen was well



known. The Prince had refused point-blank to go in, and would not allow any rearrangement of two tables to be made. He had, as was his custom, been punctual to the minute at half past eight. It was now twelve minutes to nine. There, in this large room, stood this select and distinguished company in the worst of tempers, and there on the other hand was I, a young boy asked as a special favour and compliment. Of course, I had a perfectly good explanation, one that I have frequently had to use since. I had not started soon enough! I put it aside. I stammered a few words of apology, and advanced to make my bow. "Don't they teach you to be punctual in your regiment, Winston?" said the Prince in his most severe tone. It was an awful moment! We went into dinner two by two and sat down: fourteen. After about a quarter of an hour the Prince, who was a naturally and genuinely kind-hearted man, put me at my ease again by some gracious chaffing remark.

WE SAILED from Southampton for India in a trooper carrying about twelve hundred men, and after a voyage of twenty-three days were delighted to see the palms and palaces of Bombay lying about us in a wide crescent. A shoal of tiny boats lay around us, and in one of these several of us were rowed to the Sassoon Dock. We came alongside a great stone wall with dripping steps and iron rings for hand-holds. The boat rose and fell four or five feet with the surges. I put out my hand and grasped at a ring; but before I could get my feet on the steps the boat swung away, giving my right shoulder a sharp and peculiar wrench. I scrambled up all right, hugged my shoulder and soon thought no more about it.

Quite an exceptional strain is required to tear the capsule which holds the shoulder joint together; but once the deed is done, a terrible liability remains. Although my shoulder did not actually go out, I had sustained an injury which was to last me my life; which was to cripple me at polo, to prevent me from ever playing tennis, and to be a grave embarrassment in moments of peril, violence and effort. Since then, at irregular intervals my shoulder has dislocated on the most unexpected pretexts: sleeping with my arm under the pillow, taking a book from the library shelves. Once it very nearly went out through a too expansive gesture in the House of Commons.

However, you never can tell whether bad luck may not after all turn out to be good luck. Perhaps if in the charge of Orîdurman I had been able to use a sword, instead of a modern weapon like a Mauser pistol, my story might not have got so far as the telling. One must never forget when misfortunes come that it is quite possible they are saving one from something much worse; or that when you make some great mistake, it may very easily serve you better than the best-advised decision. Life is a whole, and luck is a whole, and no part of them can be separated from the rest.

The regiment was sent into a rest camp at Poona, and we passed our second night in India in large double-fly tents upon a spacious plain. Daylight brought suave, ceremonious, turbaned applicants for the offices of butler, dressing boy and head groom, which in those days formed the foundation of the cavalry subaltern's household. All bore trustworthy testimonials with them from the home-going regiment and, after brief formalities and salaams, laid hold of one's worldly possessions and assumed absolute responsibility for one's whole domestic life. If you liked to be waited on and relieved of home worries, India thirty years ago was perfection. All you had to do was to hand over all your uniforms and clothes to the dressing boy, your ponies to the syce, and your money to the butler. Your Cabinet was complete; each of these ministers entered upon his department with knowledge, experience and fidelity. For a humble wage, justice and a few kind words, they would devote their lives to their task. No toil was too hard, no hours were too long, no dangers too great for their unruffled calm or their unfailing care. Princes could live no better than we.

Among the suitors at our tent there arrived with some commotion a splendid man in a red-and-gold frock-coat bearing an envelope with a puissant crest. He was a messenger from the Governor, Lord Sandhurst, inviting me and a companion to dine that night at Government House. Thither, after a long day occupied mainly in scolding the troopers for forgetting to wear their pith helmets, we repaired, and enjoyed a banquet of glitter, pomp and iced champagne. His Excellency was good enough to ask my opinion upon several matters, and considering the magnificent character of his hospitality, I thought it would be unbecoming in me not to reply fully. I have forgotten the particular points of

British and Indian affairs upon which he sought my counsel; all I can remember is that I responded generously. There were indeed moments when he seemed willing to impart his own views; but I thought it would be ungracious to put him to so much trouble; and he very readily subsided. He kindly sent his aide-de-camp with us to make sure we found our way back to camp all right. The British troops were housed in large, cool, colonnaded barracks. No quarters, however, were provided for the officers. We drew instead a lodging allowance which together with pay and other incidentals filled with silver rupees a string net bag as big as a prize turnip. The subaltern receiving his bag of silver at the end of each month cantered home with it to his bungalow, threw it to his beaming butler, and then in theory had no further material cares. It was, however, better to supplement the rewards of the Queen-Empress by an allowance from home three or four times as great. Altogether we received for our services about fourteen shillings a day with about three pounds a month on which to keep two horses. This, together with five hundred pounds a year paid quarterly, was my sole means of support: all the rest had to be borrowed from the all-too-accommodating native bankers, very fat, very urbane, quite honest and mercilessly rapacious. These smiling financiers charged two per cent *a month* and made quite a good living out of it.

Three of us, pooling all our resources, took a palatial bungalow, all pink and white, with heavy tiled roof and deep verandas sustained by white plaster columns, wreathed in purple bougainvillæa. We built a barn large enough to stable thirty ponies. Our three butlers formed a triumvirate in which no internal dissensions ever appeared.

The serious purpose of our life was expressed in one word—Polo. It was upon this, apart from duty, that all our interest was concentrated. Since it took some time to get a proper stud of ponies together, a regiment coming from home was never expected to count in the Indian polo world for a couple of years. However, our polo club determined upon a bold and novel stroke. It was decided that we should purchase the entire polo stud of twenty-five Arabian ponies possessed by the Poona Light Horse, a native regiment on permanent station, strongly officered by British. I can hardly describe the sustained intensity of purpose with which we trained for our first incursion into the Indian

polo world. Within six weeks of our landing, the tournament for the Golconda Cup was played in Hyderabad.

Our hosts for the tournament, the 19th Hussars, received us with open arms, and informed us with all suitable condolences that we had had the great misfortune to draw the Golconda team in the first round. They were sincere when they said what bad luck it was for us, after being so little time in India, to be confronted in our first match with the Golcondas, incomparably the best team in southern India.

In the morning we were spectators of a review of the entire garrison. The British troops, the regular Indian troops and the army of the Nizam of Hyderabad paraded and defiled in martial pomp before us. At the end came a score of elephants drawing tandem-fashion gigantic cannon. The elephants saluted as they marched past by raising their trunks with exemplary precision.

In the afternoon there was the polo match. Without going into details which, though important, are effaced by the march of time and greater events, amid roars of excitement from the assembled multitudes we defeated the Golcondas by nine goals to three. On succeeding days we made short work of all other opponents, and established the record of winning a first-class tournament within fifty days of landing in India.

There were, of course, also a great many military duties. Just before dawn, every morning, one was awakened by a dusky figure with a clammy hand applying a gleaming razor to one's lathered and defenceless face. By six o'clock the regiment was on parade, and we drilled and manœuvred for an hour and a half before returning for baths and breakfast. Then duties at the stables and orderly-room till about eleven o'clock, when all white men were in shelter. We nipped across to luncheon at half-past one in blistering heat and then returned to sleep till five o'clock. Now the station begins to live again. It is the hour of Polo. It is the hour for which we have been living all day long. I was accustomed in those days to play every chukker I could get into. I very rarely played less than eight and more often ten or twelve.

As the shadows lengthened over the polo ground, we ambled back perspiring and exhausted to hot baths, rest, and at eight-thirty dinner, to the strains of the regimental band and the clinking of ice in well-filled glasses. Thereafter, those who were not so unlucky as to be caught by

the senior officers to play a tiresome game called whist, sat smoking in the moonlight till half past ten or eleven. Such was "the long, long Indian day" as I knew it for three years; and not such a bad day, either.

It was not until the winter of 1896, when I had almost completed my twenty-second year, that the desire for learning came upon me. I began to feel myself wanting in even the vaguest knowledge about many large spheres of thought. I had picked up a wide vocabulary and had a liking for words and for the feel of words fitting and falling into their places like pennies in the slot. I caught myself using a good many words the meaning of which I could not define precisely.

I knew, of course, that the youths at the universities were stuffed with erudition at nineteen and twenty. We never set much store by them, remembering that they were only at their books, while we were commanding men and guarding the Empire. Nevertheless, I had sometimes resented the apt and copious information which some of them seemed to possess, and I now wished I could find a competent teacher whom I could listen to and cross-examine for an hour or so every day.

So I resolved to read history, philosophy, economics. I wrote to my mother asking for books on these topics. For the next two years, I read for four or five hours every day. It was a curious education. I approached it with an empty, hungry mind, and with fairly strong jaws; and what I got I bit.

My various readings during the long glistening middle hours of the Indian day led me to ask myself questions about religion. Hitherto I had dutifully accepted everything I had been told. At Harrow there were three services every Sunday, besides morning and evening prayers throughout the week. All this was very good. I accumulated in those years so fine a surplus in the Bank of Observance that I have been drawing confidently upon it ever since. Weddings, christenings and funerals have brought in a steady annual income, and I have never made too close inquiries about the state of my account. It might well even be that I should find an overdraft. But now in these bright days of youth my attendances were well ahead of the Sundays. In the army there was general agreement that if you tried your best to live an





honourable life and did your duty and were faithful to friends and not unkind to the weak and poor, it did not matter much what you believed or disbelieved. All would come out right. This is what would nowadays I suppose be called "The Religion of Healthy Mindedness."

However, I now began to read a number of books which challenged my whole religious education. The first of these, a concise and well-written universal history of mankind, dealing in harsh terms with the mysteries of all religions and leading to the depressing conclusion that we simply go out like candles, startled and indeed offended me. But then I found that other notable historians evidently held the same view. For a time I was indignant at having been told so many untruths, as I then regarded them, by the schoolmasters and clergy who had guided my youth. I passed through a violent and aggressive anti-religious phase which, had it lasted, might easily have made me a nuisance. My poise was restored during the next few years by frequent contact with danger. I found that whatever I might think and argue, I did not hesitate to ask for special protection when about to come under the fire of the enemy; nor to feel sincerely grateful when I got home safe to tea. This practice seemed perfectly natural, and just as strong and real as the reasoning process which contradicted it so sharply. Moreover, the practice was comforting and the reasoning led nowhere. I therefore acted in accordance with my feelings without troubling to square such conduct with the conclusions of thought.

Indeed, it seemed good to let the mind explore so far as it could the paths of thought and logic, and also good to pray for help and succour, and be thankful when they came. I could not feel that the Supreme Creator who gave us our minds as well as our souls would be offended if they did not always run smoothly together in double harness. After all He must have foreseen this from the beginning and of course He would understand it all. I therefore adopted quite early in life a system of believing whatever I wanted to believe, while at the same time leaving reason to pursue unfettered whatever paths she was capable of treading.

I WAS spending a three months' leave in England in 1897 when the revolt of the Pathan tribesmen of the Indian frontier began. I read in

the newspapers that a field force of three brigades had been formed, and that at the head of it stood Sir Bindon Blood, an old friend of my father's who had promised to help me see active service. Forthwith I telegraphed reminding him of his promise, and caught the next returning Indian Mail steamer. I impressed into my cause Lord William Beresford, a family connection who had won the Victoria Cross in Zululand. He reinforced my appeals to the general. He entertained me at the Marlborough Club before my train left Victoria. These Beresfords had a great air. They made one feel that the world and everyone in it were of fine consequence. I remember the manner in which he announced my purpose to a circle of club friends many years my senior. "He goes to the East tonight—to the seat of war." "To the East"—the expression struck me. Most people would have said, "He is going out to India"; but to that generation the East meant the gateway to the adventures and conquests of England. "To the Front?" they asked. Alas, I could only say I hoped so.

Arriving in India, I found good news awaiting me at Bombay. Sir Bindon Blood's message was: "Very difficult; no vacancies; come up as a correspondent; will try to fit you in. B. B."

I had first of all to obtain leave from my regiment at Bangalore. The Colonel was indulgent. I was told that I could go and try my luck with the Malakand Field Force. Meanwhile I had been commissioned as war correspondent by the *Pioneer* newspaper, and my mother had also arranged in England that my letters should be simultaneously published in the *Daily Telegraph*, for which that journal was willing to pay five pounds a column. This was not much, considering that I had to pay all my own expenses. Armed with these journalistic credentials and my telegram from Sir Bindon Blood, I sped to the Bangalore railway station and bought a ticket for Nowshera. The Indian clerk, having collected from me a small sack of rupees, pushed an ordinary ticket through a pigeon-hole. I had the curiosity to ask how far it was. The polite Indian consulted a railway time-table and impassively answered two thousand and twenty-eight miles. Quite a big place, India! This meant a five days' journey in the worst of the heat.

I broke my journey for a night and day at Rawalpindi where I had a subaltern friend in the 4th Dragoon Guards. After dinner we repaired



to the Sergeants' Mess, where a spirited sing-song was in progress. Few things recall the past so potently as a tune. I have got tunes in my head for every war I have been to, and indeed for every critical or exciting phase in my life. Some day when my ship comes home, I am going to have them all collected in gramophone records, and then I will sit in a chair and smoke my cigar, while pictures and faces, moods and sensations long-vanished return; and pale but true there gleams the light of other days. I remember well the songs the soldiers sang on this occasion. There was a song about some shocking invention which had just been made enabling photographs to be taken through a screen or other obstruction.

"The inside of everything you see,  
A terrible thing, an 'orrible thing, is the new photographee."

Of course, we treated it all as a joke, but afterwards I read in the newspaper that they might some day even be able to see the very bones in your body! Then there was the song, the chorus of which was—

"And England asks the question  
When danger's nigh  
Will the sons of India do or die?"

—and naturally a reassuring answer was forthcoming. But the best of all was—

"Great White Mother, far across the sea,  
Ruler of the Empire may she ever be.  
Long may she reign, glorious and free,  
In the Great White Motherland."

I felt much uplifted by these noble sentiments especially after having been spaciouly entertained at the regimental mess.

From the railhead at Nowshera it was a forty-mile trip by tonga—a kind of little cart drawn by relays of galloping ponies—to Sir Bindon Blood's field headquarters. Yellow with dust I presented myself at the Staff office. The General was away.

I endeavoured to turn Sir Bindon Blood's absence to the best advantage. I acquired an entirely new faculty. Until this time I had never been able to drink whisky. I liked wine, especially champagne; and on very special occasions I could even drink a small brandy and soda, the drink of my father's era. But this whisky I had never been able to face. I now found myself in heat which was terrific, with absolutely nothing to drink, apart from tea, except tepid water or tepid water with lime-juice or tepid water with whisky. Faced with these alternatives I "grasped the larger hope." Sustained by my high morale, and wishing to fit myself for active-service conditions, by the end of five days I overcame completely my repugnance to the taste of whisky. Nor was this a momentary acquirement. On the contrary, the ground I gained in those days I have firmly entrenched and held throughout my whole life. To this day, although I have always practised true temperance, I have never shrunk when occasion warranted it from the main basic standing refreshment of the white officer in the East.

I had also in these five days to fit myself out in all respects for the approaching movement of our force. I had to buy two good horses, engage a military groom, and complete my martial wardrobe in many particulars. Unluckily for them, but very conveniently for me, several officers had been killed in the preceding week, and their effects were, in accordance with Anglo-Indian campaigning custom, sold by auction as soon as the funeral (if any) was over. Here was much the best market. The camp auctioneer realized far better prices than any widow or mother could have. Still I must admit that I felt a pang when a few weeks later I first slung round my shoulder the lanyard of a gallant friend I had seen killed the day before.

CAMPAIGNING on the Indian frontier is an experience by itself. Neither the landscape nor the people find their counterparts in any other portion of the globe. Valley walls rise steeply five or six thousand feet on every side. The columns crawl through a maze of giant corridors down which fierce snow-fed torrents foam under skies of brass. Amid these scenes of savage brilliancy there dwells a race whose qualities seem to harmonize with their environment. Except at harvest-time, when self-preservation enjoins a temporary truce, the Pathan tribes are always

engaged in private or public war. Every man is a warrior; every family cultivates its vendetta; every clan its feud. The life of the Pathan is thus full of interest; and his valleys, nourished alike by endless sunshine and abundant water, are fertile enough to yield with little labour the modest material requirements of a sparse population.

Into this happy world the nineteenth century brought two new facts: the breech-loading rifle and the British Government. The first was an enormous luxury and blessing; the second, an unmitigated nuisance. The convenience of the breech-loading rifle was nowhere more appreciated than in the Indian highlands. A weapon which would kill with accuracy at fifteen hundred yards opened a whole new vista of delights to every family or clan. From one's own house one could fire at one's neighbour nearly a mile away. One could lie in wait on some high crag and at hitherto unheard-of ranges hit a horseman far below. Fabulous prices were therefore offered for these glorious products of science. Rifle thieves scoured all India to reinforce the efforts of the honest smuggler. A steady flow of the coveted weapons spread its genial influence throughout the frontier, and the respect which the Pathan tribesmen entertained for Christian civilization was vastly enhanced.

The action of the British Government on the other hand was entirely unsatisfactory. That great organizing, advancing, absorbing power was a monstrous spoil-sport. If the Pathans made forays into the plains, not only were they driven back (which after all was no more than fair), but a whole series of subsequent interferences took place; expeditions toiled laboriously through the valleys, scolding the tribesmen and exacting fines for any damage which they had done. No one would have minded these expeditions if they had simply come, had a fight and then gone away again. But these intruders began to make roads through many of the valleys. All along the road people were expected to keep quiet, not to shoot one another, and, above all, not to shoot at travellers along the road. It was too much to ask, and a whole series of quarrels, including the one in which we were now to engage, took their origin from this source.

Our march led us past the mouth of the Mamund Valley, a pan-shaped plain nearly ten miles broad. No dispute existed between us and the Mamunds. Their reputation was pestilential, and the greatest care

was taken to leave them alone. But our twinkling camp-fires offered a target too tempting for human nature as developed on the Indian frontier to resist. Sniping by individuals was inevitable and began after dark upon the camp of our leading brigade. No great harm was done. A few men were wounded. Sir Bindon Blood continued his dinner impassively, although at one moment we had to put out the candles. In the morning, overlooking the Mamund impudence, we marched on. But the tribesmen were now excited, and when our second brigade arrived two days later, hundreds of men, armed with every kind of weapon from the oldest flintlock to the latest rifle, spent three exhilarating hours in firing continuously into the crowded array of men and animals. This night's sport cost about forty officers and men, and many horses and pack animals besides. On this being reported, Sir Bindon Blood sent orders to General Jeffreys commanding the second brigade to enter the valley on the following day and chastise the truculent Mamunds. The chastisement was to take the form of marching up their valley, which is a cul-de-sac, to its extreme point, destroying all the crops, breaking the reservoirs of water, blowing up as many castles as time permitted, and shooting anyone who obstructed the process. "If you want to see a fight," said Sir Bindon to me, "you may ride back and join Jeffreys." I availed myself of an escort of Bengal Lancers which was returning to the second brigade headquarters.

Next day at earliest dawn our whole brigade, preceded by a squadron of Bengal Lancers, marched in warlike formation into the Mamund Valley. There were three separate detachments, each of which had its own punitive mission to fulfil. As these diverged fanwise, and as our total number did not exceed twelve hundred fighting men, we were all soon reduced to quite small parties. I attached myself to the centre column whose mission it was to proceed to the farthest end of the valley. I began by riding with the cavalry.

We got to the head of the valley without a shot being fired.

As we approached the mountain wall our field-glasses showed us clusters of tiny figures gathered on a conical hill. We dismounted and opened fire at seven hundred yards' range. Instantly the whole hill became spotted with white puffs of smoke, and bullets began to whistle near us. After this enjoyable skirmish had crackled away for nearly an

hour, it was settled that a company of Sikhs should attack a village of a few mud huts whose roofs could be seen amid the boulders and waving Indian corn of the mountainside. The cavalry meanwhile would guard the plain and keep connection with the reserve of our force.

I gave my pony to a native and began to toil up the hillside towards the village with the Sikhs. It was frightfully hot. We plodded and stumbled upward for nearly an hour. A few shots were fired from higher up the mountain; but otherwise complete peace seemed to reign. At about eleven o'clock, as I paused to mop my brow, it struck me that there were no troops to be seen. Where was our army? They had marched out twelve hundred strong only a few hours ago, and now the valley had swallowed them all up. I took out my glasses and searched the plain. It occurred to me for the first time that we were a very small party: five British officers including myself, and probably eighty-five Sikhs. Like most young fools I was looking for trouble, and only hoped that something exciting would happen. It did!

When our company reached the village we found it deserted. I lay down with an officer and eight Sikhs on the side of the village towards the mountain, while the remainder of the company rummaged about the mud houses behind us. While we lay there the captain of the company came up with orders.

"We are going to withdraw," he said to the subaltern. "You stay here and cover our retirement till we take up a fresh position on that knoll below the village." He added, "The colonel thinks we are rather in the air here."

It struck me this was a sound observation. But all was quiet until the company had been withdrawn. Then suddenly, before we could join them, the mountainside sprang to life. Swords flashed from behind rocks, bright flags waved here and there. A dozen widely scattered white smoke puffs broke in front of us. Loud explosions resounded close at hand. From high up on the crag, two or three thousand feet above us, white or blue figures appeared, dropping down the mountainside from ledge to ledge. A shrill crying arose from many points. The whole hillside began to be spotted with smoke, and tiny figures descended every moment nearer towards us. Our eight Sikhs opened an independent fire. The hostile figures continued to flow down the mountainside, and

scores began to gather in rocks about a hundred yards away from us. The targets were too tempting to be resisted. I borrowed the rifle of the Sikh by whom I lay. He was quite content to hand me cartridges. I began to shoot carefully. We had found the adventure for which we had been looking.

An English voice spoke close behind. It was the battalion adjutant.

"Come on back now. We can cover you from the knoll."

The Sikh whose rifle I had borrowed had put eight or ten cartridges on the ground beside me. It was a standing rule to let no ammunition fall into the hands of the tribesmen, so I handed him the cartridges, one after the other, to put in his pouch. This was a lucky inspiration. The rest of our party got up and turned to retreat. There was a ragged volley from the rocks. I thought for the moment that five or six of our men had lain down again. So they had: two killed and three wounded. One man was shot through the breast and pouring with blood; another lay on his back kicking and twisting. The British officer was spinning round just behind me, his face a mass of blood, his right eye cut out. Yes, it was certainly an adventure.

It is a point of honour on the Indian frontier not to leave wounded men behind. Death by inches and hideous mutilation are the invariable measure meted out to all who fall in battle into the hands of the Pathan tribesmen. Back came the adjutant, with several soldiers. We all laid hands on the wounded and began to carry and drag them away down the hill. We emerged upon a bare strip of ground where the captain commanding the company stood with half a dozen men. Below was the knoll on which a supporting party should have been posted. No sign of them! We hustled across the open space making for the knoll lower down. Then twenty or thirty furious figures appeared among the houses, firing frantically or waving their swords.

I looked round. The adjutant had been shot. Four of his soldiers were carrying him. At this point out from the edge of the houses rushed half a dozen Pathan swordsmen. The bearers of the poor adjutant let him fall and fled at their approach. The leading tribesman rushed upon the prostrate figure and slashed it three or four times with his sword. I forgot everything else at this moment except a desire to kill this man. I pulled out my revolver, took, as I thought, most careful aim and

fired. No result. I fired again. No result. I fired again. Whether I hit him or not I cannot tell. At any rate he ran back two or three yards and plumped down behind a rock. The fusillade was continuous. I looked round. I was all alone with the enemy. Not a friend was to be seen. I ran as fast as I could. There were bullets everywhere. I got to the first knoll. Hurrah, there were the Sikhs holding the lower one! They made vehement gestures, and in a few moments I was among them.

There was still about three-quarters of a mile of the ridge to traverse before the plain was reached, and on each side of us other ridges ran downward. Along these rushed our pursuers, striving to cut us off and firing into both our flanks. We fetched up at the bottom little better than a mob, but still with our wounded.

The survivors of the company were now drawn up two deep, shoulder to shoulder, while the tribesmen, who must have now numbered three hundred, gathered in a wide and spreading half-moon around our flanks. Above the din and confusion the captain ordered the company to cease their wild and ragged fusillade. Then he gave the order to fire. Crash! At least a dozen tribesmen fell. Another volley, and they wavered. A third, and they began to withdraw up the hillside. The bugler began to sound the "Charge." Everyone shouted. The crisis was over, and here, praise be to God, were the leading files of the Buffs.\*

Then we rejoiced and ate our lunch.

In the afternoon it was obstinately decided to retake, with the help of the Buffs, the ridge down which we had been driven. This took us till five o'clock. The shadows of evening had already fallen and all the other detachments had already got home when we marched into camp. But where was the General? And where was his staff?

Two hours later, out of the darkness and over the usual drizzle of sniping there resounded the boom of a gun, calculated to be about three miles away. It was followed at short intervals by perhaps twenty more reports, then silence. What could be happening? Where *was* the General? We now knew that he had with him besides a mule battery, half a company of troops and in all about ten white officers. Against

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\* The East Kent Regiment.



what targets was he firing his artillery in the blackness of night? Ought we to set out to his relief? Volunteers were not lacking.

The senior officers consulted together. As so often happens when things go wrong, formalities were discarded, and I found myself taking part in the discussion. It was decided that no troops could leave the camp in the night. The General and the battery must fight it out wherever they were till daylight. Again the guns in the valley fired. So they had not been scuppered yet.

I slept soundly, booted and spurred, that night, and set out at the first light of dawn with a squadron of Bengal Lancers, supported by a column of infantry. We found the General and his battery bunched up in a mud village. Overtaken by the darkness, he had thrown his force into some of the houses and improvised a sort of fort.

The Mamunds had arrived in the village at the same time, and all night long a fierce struggle had raged from house to house and in the alleys of this mud labyrinth. The assailants knew every inch of the ground perfectly. They were fighting in their own kitchens and parlours. The defenders simply hung on where they could, in almost total darkness. The tribesmen broke through the walls, or clambered on or through the roofs, firing, and stabbing with their long knives. Men grappled with each other; shot each other in error; cannon were fired as you might fire a pistol at an enemy two or three yards away. Four of the ten British officers were wounded.

Our orders now were to lay waste the Mamund Valley with fire and sword in vengeance. This accordingly we did, in the following days. So long as the villages were in the plain, this was quite easy. When, however, we had to attack the villages on the sides of the mountains they resisted fiercely, and we lost for every village two or three British officers and fifteen or twenty native soldiers. Whether it was worth it, I cannot tell. At any rate, at the end of a fortnight honour was satisfied.

I HAD hoped to be permanently attached to the frontier forces and to roam these valleys for some time to come. I did, indeed, get through three or four more skirmishes, which I cannot dignify with the name of actions; but my own colonel far away in Southern India began to



press for my return before the campaign was concluded. So in spite of my utmost efforts to remain with Sir Bindon Blood, I finished up at Bangalore.

I consoled myself with the thought that a larger expedition was forming for a campaign in the spring, and that I might then be able to join them. The operations, however, dissolved in prolonged negotiations, and finally resulted in a lasting peace, the wisdom of which as a budding politician I was able to approve.

During this winter I wrote my first book. I learned from England that my letters to the *Daily Telegraph* had been well received. Taking these letters as the foundation, I resolved to write the story of the expedition.

I soon experienced a real pleasure in the task of writing, and the three or four hours in the middle of every day, often devoted to slumber or cards, saw me industriously at work. The manuscript was finished shortly after Christmas and sent home to my mother to sell. She arranged for its publication.

*The Malakand Field Force* had an immediate and wide success. When the first bundle of reviews reached me together with the volume as published, I was filled with pride and pleasure. The reader must remember I had never been praised before. The only comments which had ever been made upon my work at school had been "Indifferent," "Untidy," "Slovenly," "Bad," "Very bad," etc. Now here were the erudite critics writing whole columns of praise! I was thrilled. I knew that if this would pass muster there was lots more where it came from, and I felt a new way of making a living, and of asserting myself, opening splendidly out before me. I saw that even this little book had earned me in a few months two years' pay as a subaltern. I resolved that as soon as the wars which seemed to have begun again in several parts of the world should be ended, and we had won the Polo Cup, I would free myself from all discipline and authority, and set up in perfect independence in England with nobody to give me orders or arouse me by bell or trumpet.

One letter which I received gave me extreme pleasure, and I print it here as it shows the extraordinary kindness and consideration for young people which the Prince of Wales always practised.

MARLBOROUGH HOUSE,

April 22/98

My dear Winston,

I cannot resist writing a few lines to congratulate you on the success of your book! I have read it with the greatest possible interest and I think the descriptions and the language generally excellent. Everybody is reading it, and I only hear it spoken of with praise. Having now seen active service you will wish to see more, and have as great a chance, I am sure, of winning the V.C. as Fincastle had; and I hope you will not follow the example of the latter, who I regret to say intends leaving the Army in order to go into Parliament.

You have plenty of time before you, and should certainly stick to the Army before adding M.P. to your name.

Hoping that you are flourishing,

I am,

Yours very sincerely,

A.E.\*

THE fighting on the Indian frontier had scarcely closed before the rumours of a new campaign in the Sudan began to ripen into certainty. The power of the dervish Khalifa, at Omdurman, had throughout the latter half of the century frustrated British aspirations in this area. British resentment had been aroused, in 1885, by the slaying of General Gordon at Khartoum. The determination of Lord Salisbury's Government to advance to Khartoum, crush the dervish power and liberate these immense regions from its withering tyranny, was openly avowed. Sir Herbert Kitchener with a British and Egyptian force of about twenty thousand men had already advanced up the Nile, and had in a fierce action destroyed the army of Mahmud, the Khalifa's lieutenant, which had been sent to oppose him. There remained only the final phase of the long drama of the Sudan—the advance two hundred miles southward to the dervish capital and the decisive battle with the whole strength of the dervish empire.

I was deeply anxious to share in this and went to London to see about being transferred.

But now I began to encounter resistances of a new and formidable character. When I had first gone into the army, and wanted to go on

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\* Albert Edward; afterwards King Edward VII.

active service, nearly everyone had been friendly and encouraging. I now perceived that there were many ill-disposed people who did not take a favourable view of my activities. They began to say things like this: "Who the devil is this fellow? How has he managed to get to these different campaigns? How does he get so much leave from his regiment? Look at all the hard-working men who have never stirred an inch from the daily round and common task. What Second Lieutenant Churchill requires is a long period of discipline and routine." The expressions "medal-hunter" and "self-advertiser" were even used from time to time in some high and some low military circles in a manner surprising and painful. It is melancholy to be forced to record these less amiable aspects of human nature, which by a most curious and indeed unaccountable coincidence have always seemed to present themselves in the wake of my innocent footsteps.

However, after my mother and I had spent several weeks in mobilizing all the influence we could bring to bear, I received the following laconic communication from the War Office.

"You have been attached as a supernumerary lieutenant to the 21st Lancers for the Sudan Campaign. You are to report at once at the Abassiyeh Barracks, Cairo. It is understood that you will proceed at your own expense and that in the event of your being killed or wounded in the impending operations, or for any other reason, no charge of any kind will fall on British army funds."

Feeling the force of Napoleon's maxim that "war should support war," I arranged that night with a great friend of mine, the son of the proprietor of the *Morning Post*, that I should write as opportunity served a series of letters at fifteen pounds a column. The president of the Psychical Research Society extracted from me the rather unseasonable promise to "communicate" with him should anything unfortunate occur. My mother waved me off in gallant style. Six days later I was in Cairo.

ALL WAS excitement and hustle at Abassiyeh Barracks. Two squadrons of my regiment had already started up the Nile. The other two were to leave the next morning.

The movement of the 21st Lancers fourteen hundred miles into the

heart of Africa was effected with the swiftness, smoothness and punctuality which in those days characterized all Sir Herbert Kitchener's arrangements. We were transported by train to Assiout; then by stern-wheeled steamers to Assouan. We led our horses round the cataract of the Nile, re-embarked on other steamers and voyaged four days to a railhead, and from there proceeded four hundred miles across the desert by the marvellous military railway whose completion had sealed the fate of the dervish power. A fortnight after leaving Cairo we arrived in the camp and railway base of the army, where the waters of the Atbara flow into the mighty Nile, then journeyed forward by a nine days' march to the advanced camp. Omdurman was now only eighteen miles away.

Nothing like the Battle of Omdurman will ever be seen again. It was the last of those spectacular conflicts whose vivid and majestic splendour has done so much to invest war with glamour. Everything was visible to the naked eye in a shimmer of unreality and illusion. Batteries of artillery or long columns of cavalry emerged from a filmy world of uneven crystal on to the crisp surface of the desert plain, and took up their positions amid jagged red-black rocks with violent shadows. Over all the immense dome of the sky, pierced by the flaming sun, weighed hard and heavy on marching necks and shoulders.

On September 1 we set forth on our final advance in full order of battle. Towards nine o'clock our patrols began to see things. Reports trickled through of white patches and gleams of light amid the mirage glitter which shrouded the southern horizon. The squadron to which I belonged was supporting the advanced screen, and we rode slowly forward with growing excitement. Soon we topped a broad swell of sand and saw before us, scarcely a mile away, all our advanced patrols and parties halted in a long line, observing on the distant horizon something which looked like a forest of thorn-bushes. Soon the momentous news came back to us: "Enemy in sight. Quite a good army."

That morning, I had occasion to see, from an eminence, the British and Egyptian army advancing in battle array. The sight was truly magnificent. Five solid brigades of three or four infantry battalions each, marching in open columns, echeloned back from the Nile. Behind

these great blocks of men followed long rows of artillery, and beyond these there trailed out interminable strings of camels carrying supplies. On the river moved masses of heavily laden sailing boats towed by a score of stern-wheel steamers and seven or eight large white gunboats ready for action. On the desert flank the columns of the camel corps completed the spacious panorama.

The opposing forces halted at some distance from each other, and there was no battle of September 1. The dervish army, after giving a tremendous *feu de joie*, seemed to settle down for the night. We watched them all the afternoon and evening, and our patrols skirmished and scampered about with theirs. It was not until the light faded that we returned to the Nile and were ordered to make camp under the steep bank of the river.

In this sheltered but helpless posture we were informed that trustworthy news had been received that the enemy would attack by night. The most severe penalties were denounced against anyone who in any circumstances whatever—even to save his life—fired a shot inside the perimeter of the camp. If the dervishes broke the line and penetrated the camp, we were to defend ourselves by fighting on foot with our lances or swords. With full confidence in the plan of using cavalry swords and lances on foot amid the sand dunes against a dervish mob in pitch darkness, we addressed ourselves to preparations for dinner.

This kind of war was full of fascinating thrills. It was not like the Great War. Nobody expected to be killed. Here and there in every regiment or battalion, half a dozen, a score, at the worst thirty or forty, would pay the forfeit; but to the great mass of those who took part in the little wars of Britain in those vanished light-hearted days, this was only a sporting element in a splendid game.

Everything depends upon the scale of events. We young men who lay down to sleep that night within three miles of sixty thousand well-armed fanatical dervishes, expecting every moment their violent onset or inrush and sure of fighting at latest with the dawn—we may perhaps be pardoned if we thought we were at grips with real war.

LONG BEFORE the dawn we were astir, and by five o'clock the 21st Lancers were drawn up mounted outside the camp. I was called out

from my troop to advance with a patrol and reconnoitre the ridge between the dervish encampment and the river. I took six men and a corporal. We trotted fast over the plain and soon began to breast the unknown slopes. Was the ridge held by the enemy? Were we riding through the gloom into thousands of ferocious savages? Every step might be deadly; yet there was no time for overmuch precaution. The regiment was coming on behind us, and dawn was breaking. For cool, tense excitement I commend the quarter of an hour before the curtain is lifted upon an unknowable situation.

Now we have reached the crest line. We can see more than half a mile. *They are there!* The enormous black smears below us are thousands of men; the shimmering in the distant plain is the glinting of their weapons.

A glorious sunrise is taking place behind us. It is already light enough to use field-glasses. The masses define themselves into ordered ranks bright with glittering weapons, and above them dance a multitude of gorgeous flags. We see for ourselves what the Crusaders saw. I slip off my horse; I write in my field-service note-book: "The dervish army is still in position." I send this message by the corporal direct to the Commander-in-Chief. I mark it XXX. In the words of the drill book "with all dispatch," or as one would say, "Hell for leather." This is no place for Christians. We scamper off. The enemy come on like the sea.

The whole of the Khalifa's army, nearly sixty thousand strong, advancing in battle order from their encampment of the night before, topped the swell of ground which hid the two armies from one another, and then rolled down the gently sloping amphitheatre in the arena of which Kitchener's twenty thousand troops were drawn up shoulder to shoulder to receive them. Ancient and modern confronted one another. The weapons, the methods and the fanaticism of the Middle Ages were brought by an extraordinary anachronism into dire collision with the organization and inventions of the nineteenth century.

The result was not surprising. As the successors of the Saracens swept down the long smooth slope, they encountered the rifle fire of our infantry, supported by at least seventy guns on the river bank, of the Nile and in the gunboats. The whole attack withered and came to a standstill at least seven hundred yards away from the British-Egyptian line, with

a loss of at least six thousand men. The dervish army, however, possessed nearly twenty thousand rifles of various kinds, and when the spearmen could get no farther, these riflemen lay down on the plain and began a ragged, unaimed fusillade. In the short space that this lasted perhaps two hundred casualties occurred among our troops.

Seeing that the attack had been repulsed, and that he was nearer to Omdurman than the dervish army, Kitchener immediately wheeled his five brigades into echelon formation and proceeded to march towards the city, intending to cut off what he considered to be the remnants of the dervish army from their capital. But the whole dervish left, having overshot the mark, had not even been under fire, and their reserves, perhaps fifteen thousand men, were still intact. These swarms now advanced with undaunted courage to attack the British and Egyptian forces which were no longer drawn up in a prepared position, but marching freely over the desert. This second shock was far more critical than the first. The charging dervishes succeeded everywhere in coming to within a hundred or two hundred yards of the troops, and our rear brigade of Sudanese, attacked from two directions, was only saved from destruction by the skill and firmness of its commander, General Hector Macdonald. However, discipline and machinery triumphed over the most desperate valour, and after an enormous carnage, certainly exceeding twenty thousand men, who strewed the ground in heaps, the whole mass of the dervishes dissolved into fragments and streamed away into the mirages of the desert.

My regiment, the 21st Lancers, were the only horsemen on the left flank nearest to Omdurman. Immediately after the first attack had been repulsed we were ordered to ascertain what enemy forces, if any, stood between Kitchener and the city, and if possible, drive these forces back and clear the way for the advancing army. We ascended again the ridge which had played its part in the first stages of the action, and soon saw before us the whole plain of Omdurman with the vast mud city, its minarets and domes, spread before us six or seven miles away.

Everyone expected that we were going to make a charge. But where was the enemy? We continued to pace forward over the hard sand in a high state of suppressed excitement. Presently I noticed, three hundred yards away on our flank and parallel to the line on which we were



advancing, a long row of blue-black objects, two or three yards apart. I thought there were about a hundred and fifty. Then I became sure that these were men—enemy men—squatting on the ground. Almost at the same moment the trumpet sounded “Trot,” and the whole long column of cavalry began to jingle and clatter across the front of these crouching figures. Forthwith from every blue-black blob came a white puff of smoke, and a loud volley of musketry rang out. Such a target at such a distance could scarcely be missed, and all along the column here and there horses bounded and a few men fell. The trumpet sounded “Right wheel into line,” and all the sixteen troops, of twenty lancers to a troop, swung round towards the riflemen. Almost immediately the regiment broke into a gallop, and the 21st Lancers were committed to their first charge in war!

I propose to describe exactly what happened to me: what I saw and what I felt. The impression is clear and vivid in my mind to this day. The troop I commanded was, when we wheeled into line, second from the right of the regiment. I was riding a handy, sure-footed, grey Arab polo pony. Before we wheeled and began to gallop, the officers had been marching with drawn swords. On account of my shoulder I had decided that if I were involved in hand-to-hand fighting, I must use a pistol and not a sword. I had first of all to return my sword to its scabbard, which is not the easiest thing to do at a gallop. I had then to draw my pistol from its wooden holster and bring it to full cock. This dual operation took an appreciable time, and until it was finished, apart from a few glances to my left to see what effect the fire was producing, I did not look up at the general scene.

Then I saw immediately before me, and now only half the length of a polo ground away, the row of crouching blue figures firing frantically, wreathed in white smoke. On my right and left my neighbouring troop leaders made a good line. Immediately behind was a long dancing row of lances couched for the charge. We were going at a fast gallop. There was too much trampling and rifle fire to hear any bullets. After a glance to the right and left and at my troop, I looked again towards the enemy. The scene appeared to be suddenly transformed. The blue-black men were still firing, but behind them there now came into view a depression like a shallow sunken road, crowded with men rising up from the



ground. Bright flags appeared as if by magic. The dervishes, ten or twelve deep at the thickest, filled the dry watercourse, a great grey mass gleaming with steel. In the same twinkling of an eye I saw also that our right overlapped their left, that my troop would just strike the edge of their array, and that the troop on my right would charge into air. My subaltern comrade on the right could see the situation, too; and we both increased our speed to the very fastest gallop and curved inward like the horns of the moon. One really had not time to be frightened or to think of anything but the particular necessary actions which I have described. They completely occupied mind and senses.

The collision was now very near. I saw immediately before me, not ten yards away, two men lying in my path. They were perhaps a couple of yards apart. I rode at the interval between them. They both fired. I passed through the smoke conscious that I was unhurt. The trooper immediately behind me was killed at this moment. As the ground began to fall away beneath my pony's feet, the clever animal dropped like a cat four or five feet down on to the sandy bed of the watercourse, and in this sandy bed I found myself surrounded by what seemed to be dozens of men. They were not so thickly packed at this point that I experienced any actual collision. Whereas the troop next but one on my left was brought to a complete standstill and suffered very heavy losses, we seemed to push our way through as one has sometimes seen mounted policemen break up a crowd. In less time than it takes to relate, my pony had scrambled up the other side of the ditch, I looked round.

Once again I was on the hard, crisp desert, my horse at a trot. I had the impression of scattered dervishes running to and fro in all directions. Straight before me a man threw himself on the ground. The reader must remember that I had been trained as a cavalry soldier to believe that if ever cavalry broke into a mass of infantry, the latter would be at their mercy. My first idea was that the man was terrified. But simultaneously I saw the gleam of his curved sword as he drew it back for a hamstringing cut. I had room and time enough to turn my pony out of his reach. As I straightened myself in the saddle, I saw before me another figure with uplifted sword. I raised my pistol and fired. So close were we that the pistol itself actually struck him. Man



and sword disappeared below and behind me. On my left, ten yards away, was an Arab horseman in a bright-coloured tunic and steel helmet, with chain-mail hangings. I fired at him. He turned aside. I pulled my horse into a walk and looked round again.

In one respect a cavalry charge is very like ordinary life. So long as you are all right, firmly in your saddle, your horse in hand, and well armed, lots of enemies will give you a wide berth. But as soon as you have lost a stirrup, have dropped your weapon, are wounded, then is the moment when from all quarters enemies rush upon you. Such was the fate of not a few of my comrades in the troops immediately on my left. Brought to an actual standstill in the enemy's mass, clutched at from every side, stabbed at and hacked at by spear and sword, they were dragged from their horses and cut to pieces by the infuriated foe. But this I did not at the time see or understand. I thought we were masters of the situation. The scattered dervishes about me made no attempt to molest me.

Where was my troop? Where were the other troops of the squadron? Within a hundred yards of me I could not see a single officer or man. About fifty yards away a mass of dervishes had rallied together, and I saw two or three riflemen crouching and aiming their rifles at me. Then for the first time that morning I experienced a sensation of fear. I felt myself absolutely alone. I thought these riflemen would hit me and the rest devour me like wolves. What a fool I was to loiter! I crouched over the saddle, spurred my horse into a gallop. Two or three hundred yards away I found my troop already faced about and partly formed up. The other three troops of the squadron were re-forming close by.

Suddenly in the midst of the troop up sprang a dervish. How he got there I do not know. He must have leaped out of some scrub or hole. All the troopers turned upon him thrusting with their lances; but he darted to and fro causing for the moment a frantic commotion. Wounded several times, he staggered towards me raising his spear. I shot him at less than a yard. He fell on the sand and lay there dead. How easy to kill a man! But I did not worry about it. I found I had fired the whole magazine of my Mauser pistol, so I put in a new clip of ten cartridges before thinking of anything else.

I still thought that we had inflicted a great slaughter on the enemy

and had scarcely suffered at all ourselves. We all expected to be ordered immediately to charge back again. I asked my second sergeant if he had enjoyed himself. His answer was, "Well, I don't exactly say I enjoyed it, sir; but I think I'll get more used to it next time." At this the whole troop laughed.

But now from the direction of the enemy there came a succession of grisly apparitions; horses spouting blood, struggling on three legs, men staggering on foot, men bleeding from terrible wounds, fish-hook spears stuck right through them, arms and faces cut to pieces, men gasping, crying, collapsing, expiring.

Our first task was to succour these; and meanwhile our leaders remembered for the first time that we had carbines. Trumpets were sounded and orders shouted, and we all moved off at a trot towards the flank of the enemy. Arrived at a position from which we could rake the watercourse, two squadrons dismounted and in a few minutes, with fire at three hundred yards, compelled the dervishes to retreat. We therefore remained in possession of the field.

The dervishes had carried off their wounded, and the corpses of thirty or forty enemy were all that could be counted on the ground. Among these lay the bodies of over twenty Lancers, so hacked and mutilated as to be mostly unrecognizable. In all out of three hundred and ten officers and men the regiment had lost in the space of about two or three minutes five officers and sixty-five men killed and wounded, and a hundred and twenty horses—nearly a quarter of its strength.

THE DEFEAT and destruction of the dervish army was so complete that the frugal Kitchener was able to dispense immediately with the costly services of a British cavalry regiment. Three days after the battle the 21st Lancers started home. In Cairo I found Dick Molyneux, another subaltern of the 21st, who had been seriously wounded by a sword cut above his right wrist. He was now proceeding to England, and I decided to keep him company. One day while we were talking, the doctor came in to dress his wound, a horrible gash which needed some skin grafted over it as soon as possible. The doctor, a great raw-boned Irishman, turned upon me. "Oi'll have to take it off you," he said. There was no escape, and as I rolled up my sleeve he added genially, "Ye've heard

of a man being flayed alive? Well, this is what it feels like." He then proceeded to cut a piece of skin and some flesh about the size of a shilling from the inside of my forearm. My sensations as he sawed the razor slowly to and fro fully justified his description of the ordeal. However, I managed to hold out, and that skin remains upon my friend's arm to this day. I for my part keep the scar as a souvenir.

ON MY return to London I was forced to reflect seriously upon the financial aspects of my military life. I had watched the remorseless piling up year by year of deficits. To go on soldiering even for a few more years would plainly land me in increasing difficulties. On the other hand the book I had already written and my war correspondence with the *Daily Telegraph* had already brought in about five times as much as the Queen had paid me for three years of assiduous and sometimes dangerous work. I therefore resolved with many regrets to leave the army after the completion of my term of service in India.

I returned to India and my regiment in November 1898. The following spring all the officers of the regiment subscribed to send our polo team to the Inter-Regimental Tournament at Meerut. Thirty ponies under the charge of a sergeant-major were embarked in a special train for the fourteen-hundred-mile journey. Besides their syces they were accompanied by a number of our most trustworthy non-commissioned officers. The train covered about two hundred miles a day, and every evening the ponies were taken out, rested and exercised. Thus they arrived at their destination as fit as when they started. We travelled separately but arrived at the same time.

We had arranged to play for a fortnight at Jodhpur before going to Meerut. Here we were the guests of the famous Sir Pertab Singh, the regent of Jodhpur. He entertained us royally in his large, cool, stone house. Every evening he and his young kinsmen played us in carefully conducted instruction games. Old Pertab, who loved polo next to war more than anything in the world, used to stop the game repeatedly and point out faults or possible improvements in our play and combination. "Faster, faster, same like fly," he would shout to increase the speed of the game. The Jodhpur polo ground rises in great clouds of red dust when a game is in progress. These clouds carried to leeward on the

strong breeze introduced a disturbing and somewhat dangerous complication. Turbaned figures emerged at full gallop from the dust cloud, or the ball whistled out of it unexpectedly. It was difficult to follow the whole game.

The night before we were to leave Jodhpur for Meerut a grievous misfortune overtook me. Coming down to dinner, I slipped on the stone stairs and out went my shoulder. I got it put in again fairly easily, but the whole of the muscles were strained. By the next morning I had practically lost the use of my right arm. I knew from bitter experience that it would take three weeks or even more before I could hit a polo ball hard again, and even then it would only be under the precaution of having my elbow strapped to within a few inches of my side.

The tournament was to begin in four days. The reader may well imagine my disappointment. My arm had been getting steadily stronger, and I had been playing No. 1 to the satisfaction of our team. Now I was a cripple. We luckily had a fifth man with us, so I told my friends when they picked me up, that they must take me out of the team. They considered this very gravely all the next day, and then our captain informed me that they had decided to play me in spite of everything. Even if I could not hit the ball at all and could only hold a stick in my hand, they thought that with my knowledge of the game and of our team play I should give the best chance of success.

After making sure that this decision had not been taken out of compassion, I consented to do my best.

Polo is the prince of games. It combines all the pleasure of hitting the ball, which is the foundation of so many amusements, with all the pleasures of riding and horsemanship, and to both of these there is added that intricate, loyal team-work which is the essence of football or baseball, and which renders a true combination so vastly superior to the individuals of which it is composed.

The great day arrived. As we had foreseen we met the 4th Dragoon Guards in the Final. The match from the very first moment was severe and even. Up and down the hard, smooth Indian polo ground where the ball was very rarely missed and everyone knew where it should be hit, we raced and tore. Quite soon we had scored one goal and our opponents two, and there the struggle hung for some time. Suddenly in

the midst of a confused scrimmage close by the enemy goal, I saw the ball spin towards me. I was able to lift the stick over and bending forward gave the ball a feeble forward tap. Through the goal-posts it rolled. Two all!

For three years this contest had been the main preoccupation of our lives, and we had concentrated upon it every resource we possessed. Presently I had another chance. Again the ball came to me close to the hostile goal. This time it was travelling fast, and I had no more to do in one fleeting second than to stretch out my stick and send it rolling between the posts. Three to two! Then our opponents exerting themselves swept us down the ground and scored again. Three all!

I must explain that in Indian polo in those days, in order to avoid drawn matches, subsidiary goals could be scored. Half the width of the goal-posts was laid off on either side by two small flags, and even if the goal were missed, a ball within these flags counted as a subsidiary. No number of subsidiaries equalled one goal, but when goals were equal, subsidiaries decided. Unfortunately our opponents had the best of us in subsidiaries. Unless we could score again we should lose. Once again fortune came to me, and I gave a little feeble hit at the ball among the ponies' hoofs, and for the third time saw it pass through the goal. This brought the 7th chukker to an end.

We lined up for the last period with four goals and three subsidiaries to our credit, our opponents having three goals and four subsidiaries. Thus if they got one more goal they would not merely tie, but win the match outright. Rarely have I seen such strained faces on both sides. You would not have thought it was a game at all, but a matter of life and death. Far graver crises cause less keen emotion. I do not remember anything of the last chukker as we galloped up and down the ground in desperate attack and counter-attack. One of the most welcome sounds I have ever heard was the bell which ended the match, and enabled us to say as we sat streaming and exhausted on our ponies, "We have won the Inter-Regimental Tournament."

Prolonged rejoicings, intense inward satisfaction and nocturnal festivities celebrated our victory. Do not grudge these young soldiers their joy and sport. Few of that merry throng were destined to see old age. Our own team was never to play again. It was then or never for us.



I had meanwhile been working continuously upon *The River War*, a history of the Sudan and chronicle of the Omdurman campaign. With summer, and the conclusion of my Indian service, I returned to London, hoping to publish my two-volume opus in October.

But when October came, we all had other things to think about.

## CHAPTER 4

DURING the '90's, the tide of events in South Africa had been moving steadily forward towards a crisis. The Boers and the British had long had differences concerning this area. The British, possessing the Cape Colony and Natal, controlled the southern and western coasts. The Boers had established their republic inland, in the Transvaal area. The development of deep-level gold-mining near Johannesburg had in a few years made that Transvaal city a factor in world-wide economic affairs.

The republic of Boer farmers, hitherto content to lead a pastoral life in the lonely regions into which their grandfathers had emigrated, now found themselves possessed of vast revenues from gold-mines and responsible for a thriving modern city with a very large and rapidly growing population. A strong, capable and ambitious organism of government grew up at the Boer capital, Pretoria, forty miles north of Johannesburg. It became the magnet of Dutch aspirations throughout South Africa. It nourished itself by taxing the golden spoil which was drawn to the surface in ever-growing volume. It reached out to Holland and Germany for European support. Behind all lay the unmeasured fighting strength of fifty thousand or sixty thousand fierce, prejudiced, devout Boer farmers, constituting the finest mass of rifle-armed horse-men ever seen, and the most capable mounted warriors since the Mongols.

The new inhabitants of Johannesburg—the Outlanders, as they were called—in whom British elements predominated, were dissatisfied with the bad and often corrupt administration of the Boer Government; and still more so with its heavy and increasing taxes. They proclaimed the old watchword, "No taxation without representation." They demanded votes. But since their numbers would have swamped the Boer régime,



and placed the Transvaal sovereignty in British hands, their rightful demand could by no means be conceded.

The British Government, however, championed the cause of the Outlanders. The case was overwhelming. But you can never persuade anyone by reasonable argument to give up his skin. The old inhabitants intended, by taxing them, to procure the necessary means for keeping the newcomers in subjection. If the quarrel should come to actual fighting, President Kruger and his colleagues saw no reason why Europe should not intervene on their behalf, and why they should not become masters of the whole of South Africa.

The Boers had a good case. Had they not trekked into the wilderness to avoid British rule, with its perpetual interference between them and their native subjects. They declared that the long arm of British Imperialism, clutching for gold, had pursued them even into their last refuges; and the British rejoined, in effect, that they were refusing to give civil rights to the modern productive elements who were making nine-tenths of the wealth of their country. Evil collision!

By the summer and autumn of 1899, the atmosphere had become tense, charged with electricity, laden with the presage of storm. A well-armed Transvaal police held the Outlanders in strict subjection, and German engineers were tracing the outlines of a fort to dominate Johannesburg. Cannon, ammunition, rifles streamed in from Holland and Germany in quantities sufficient not only to equip the populations of the two Boer republics, but to arm a still larger number of the Dutch race throughout the British-governed Cape Colony. Threatened by rebellion as well as war, the British Government slowly increased its garrisons in Natal and at the Cape. Meanwhile notes and dispatches of ever-deepening gravity, between Downing Street and Pretoria, succeeded one another in a sombre chain.

Suddenly in the early days of October the bold, daring men who directed the policy of the Transvaal resolved to bring the issue to a head. An ultimatum requiring the withdrawal of the British forces from the neighbourhood of the Republican frontiers was telegraphed from Pretoria. The notice gave the British three days in which to comply. From that moment war was certain.

The Boer ultimatum was not an hour old before I was offered an

appointment as principal war correspondent of the *Morning Post*—two hundred and fifty pounds a month, all expenses paid, entire discretion as to movements and opinions, four months' minimum guarantee of employment—such were the terms; higher, I think, than any previously paid in British journalism to war correspondents, and certainly attractive to a young man of twenty-four with no responsibilities. I took passage forthwith on the earliest steamer, the *Dunottar Castle*.

In quick succession there arrived the news that the Boers had taken the initiative and were advancing towards the Cape Colony and Natal, that General Sir Redvers Buller had become the British Commander-in-Chief, that the Reserves were called out, and that our only army corps was to be sent at once to the Cape.

THE British War Office of those days was the product of two generations of consistent parsimony. So utterly unrelated to the actual facts were its ideas at this time that to an Australian request to be allowed to send a contingent of troops, the only reply was, "Unmounted men preferred." Nevertheless their intelligence branch had prepared two volumes on the Boer republics, and the head of this branch told the Secretary of State for War that two hundred thousand men would be required. His views were scouted, and the two volumes sent to Buller were returned within an hour with the message that he "knew everything about South Africa." The Under-Secretary of State, who dined with me one of these nights, alone seemed to appreciate the difficulties of the task. The Boers, he said, were thoroughly prepared. He thought that the opening of the campaign might be unpleasant, that the British forces might be surrounded here and there by a far more mobile foe, and having been brought to a standstill might be pounded to pieces by a new form of heavy Maxim with which the Boers were equipped. (This gun we afterwards learned to know quite well as the pom-pom.) I must confess that in the ardour of youth I was much relieved to learn that the war would not be entirely one-sided. I thought it very sporting of the Boers to take on the whole British Empire, and I felt quite glad they were not defenceless.

Let us learn our lessons. Never, never, never believe any war will be smooth and easy, or that anyone who embarks on the strange voyage

can measure the tides and hurricanes he will encounter. Once the signal is given, the statesman is no longer the master of policy but the slave of unforeseeable and uncontrollable events. Antiquated War Offices, weak, incompetent or arrogant commanders, untrustworthy allies, hostile neutrals, malignant fortune, ugly surprises, awful miscalculations—all take their seats at the Council Board on the morrow of a declaration of war. Always remember, however sure you are that you can easily win, that there would not be a war if the other man did not think he also had a chance.

ONE OF my father's oldest friends had some years before extracted a promise from Sir Redvers Buller that, if ever that general received the command of an army in the field, he would take him on his staff. His approaching departure for the front now was made the occasion of a dinner which I was privileged to attend. The Prince of Wales and about forty men of the ruling generation formed a powerful and a merry company.

My father's friend, now an elderly man of great wealth, was to have the function of looking after the personal comfort of the Commander-in-Chief. For this purpose he was presented at the dinner with I do not know how many cases of the very best champagne and the very oldest brandy which the cellars of London boasted. He was informed by the donors that he was to share these blessings freely with me whenever opportunity arose. These cases of champagne and brandy and my share in them fell among the many disappointments of war. In order to make sure that they reached the headquarters intact, the cases were labelled "Castor Oil." Two months later in Natal, when they had not yet arrived, an urgent telegram was dispatched to Durban asking for the castor oil. The reply came back that the packages of this drug addressed to this staff officer had by an error already been issued to the hospitals. There were now, however, ample stores of castor oil available at the base and the commandant was forwarding a full supply forthwith!

Many of our South African experiences were to be similar.

THE *Dynottar Castle* sailed from Southampton on October 11, the day the Boer ultimatum expired. Sir Redvers Buller and the entire

Headquarters Staff of our one (and only) organized army corps were aboard. Buller was a characteristic British personality. He looked stolid. He said little, and what he said was obscure. He was not the kind of man who could explain things, and he never tried to do so. He usually grunted, or nodded, or shook his head, in serious discussions; and shop of all kinds was sedulously excluded from his ordinary conversation. He had shown himself a brave and skilful officer in his youth, and for nearly twenty years he had filled important administrative posts of a sedentary character. His name had long been before the public; their belief in him was unbounded. Certainly he was a man of a considerable scale. He plodded on from blunder to blunder and from one disaster to another, without losing either the regard of his country or the trust of his troops, to whose feeding as well as his own he paid serious attention. Independent, portentous, he gave the same sort of impression to the British as the French afterwards received from General Joffre.

While the issues of peace and war seemed to hang in their last flickering balance; and before a single irrevocable shot had been fired, we steamed off into grey storms. There was, of course, no wireless in those days, and therefore at this most exciting moment the Commander-in-Chief, the Headquarters Staff and the correspondent of the *Morning Post* dropped completely out of the world. Still we expected news at Madeira, which was reached on the fourth day. There was no news at Madeira, except that negotiations were at an end and that troops on both sides were moving. In this suspense we glided off again, to pass a fortnight completely cut off from all view of the drama which filled our thoughts. The liner cut her way through calm seas with placid unconcern. She did not even increase her speed above the ordinary. Such a measure would have been unprecedented. The usual sports and games of a sea voyage occupied her passengers, civil and military alike. The general opinion among the Staff was that it would be all over before they got there.

Suddenly one day there was a stir on deck. A tramp steamer was sighted ahead approaching us from the very shores that were our destination. I think she would have passed us about a mile away but for the fact that some of the younger ones among us started a buzz of excitement. "Surely we can get news from her? Can't we stop her?"

These murmurs reached the ears of high seniority. Grave counsel was taken. It was decided that it would be unusual to stop a ship at sea. Possibly there might be a claim for damages against the government, or some other penalty like that which happens if you pull the communication cord without sufficient provocation. As a bold half-measure, signals were made to the steamer, asking for news. On this she altered her course and steamed past us at little more than a hundred 'yards' distance. A blackboard was held up from the deck of the tramp, and on this we read:

BOERS DEFEATED  
THREE BATTLES  
PENN SYMONDS KILLED

She faded away behind us, and we were left to meditate upon this cryptic message.

The Staff were stunned. There had evidently been fighting—actual battles. And a British general had been killed. Was it likely, if they had been defeated in three battles, the Boers would continue their hopeless struggle? Was it possible they would have any strength left? It was not until some minutes had passed that a staff officer ventured to address Buller.

"It looks as if it will be over, sir."

Thus pressed, the great man answered, "I dare say there will be enough left to give us a fight outside Pretoria."

His military instinct was sure and true. There was quite enough left!

It was dark when we anchored in Table Bay; but the innumerable lights of Cape Town twinkled from the shore, and a stir of launches soon beset our vessel. High functionaries and naval and military officers arrived, bearing their reports. The Headquarters Staff sat up all night to read them. I got hold of a bundle of newspapers and learned that the Boers had invaded Natal, attacked our advanced forces at Dundee, killed General Penn Symonds and very nearly rounded up his three or four thousand troops as they made their hurried and hazardous retreat to Ladysmith, some hundred and twenty miles inland from the coast of Natal. Here Sir George White at the head of some twelve thousand

men, with forty or fifty guns and a brigade of cavalry, attempted to bar their further advance.

On the very day of our arrival, October 31, a disaster had occurred around Ladysmith. Nearly twelve hundred British infantry had been forced to surrender, and the rest of the widely dispersed forces were thrown back upon Ladysmith, hastily converted into an entrenched camp. Being speedily invested on all sides by the Boers, and their railway cut, the British settled down in a prolonged siege to await relief. Meanwhile, in the west other Boer forces had similarly encircled Mafeking and Kimberley, and sat down stolidly to the process of starving them out. Finally, the Dutch areas of the Cape Colony itself were quivering upon the verge of rebellion. Throughout the vast sub-continent every man's hand was against his brother, and the British Government could be sure of nothing beyond the gunshot of the navy.

It was clear as soon as we had landed that the first heavy fighting would come in Natal. Buller's army corps would take a month or six weeks to assemble. There would be time to watch the Natal operations and come back to Cape Colony for the main advance. Accordingly, I made the seven-hundred-mile railway journey from Cape Town to Port Elizabeth and continued by steamer, in the teeth of a horrible Antarctic gale, to the Natal port of Durban.

It had been my intention to get into Ladysmith; but I was too late, the door was shut. I could get no farther than Estcourt, a tiny township of a few hundred inhabitants, beyond which the trains no longer ran. The Boers had occupied the stations and held the iron railway bridge beyond. There was nothing to do but to wait at Estcourt with such handfuls of troops as were being hurriedly collected to protect the southern part of Natal from the impending Boer invasion. A single battalion of Dublin Fusiliers, two or three guns and a few squadrons of Natal Carabineers, two companies of Durban Light Infantry and an armoured train were the only forces which remained for the defence of the Colony. All the rest of the Natal army was blockaded in Ladysmith.

During the week I was at Estcourt our weakness was such that we expected to be surrounded almost every day, and could do little but fortify our post and wear a confident air. The days passed slowly and

anxiously. At any moment ten or twelve thousand mounted Boers might sweep forward to attack us or cut off our retreat. Cavalry reconnaissances were pushed out every morning to give us timely notice should the enemy advance; and in an unlucky moment it occurred to the general in command to send his armoured train along the sixteen miles of intact railway line to supplement the efforts of the cavalry.

Nothing looks more formidable and impressive than an armoured train; but nothing is in fact more vulnerable. It was only necessary to blow up a bridge or culvert to leave the monster stranded far from home and help, at the mercy of the enemy. This situation did not seem to have occurred to our commander. He decided to put two companies of infantry into an armoured train of six trucks, and add a small six-pounder naval gun with some sailors landed from H.M.S. *Terrible*, together with a breakdown gang, and to send this considerable portion of his force out to reconnoitre. Captain Haldane was selected to command this operation. Although he did not conceal his misgivings on the prudence of the enterprise, he was like everyone else at the beginning of a war, very keen upon adventure and a brush with the enemy. Would I come with him? I was eager for trouble. I accepted the invitation without demur.

The armoured train proceeded about fourteen miles towards the enemy without a sign of opposition or indeed of life or movement on the landscape. We stopped for a few moments at a station to telegraph our arrival to the general. No sooner had we done this than we saw, on a hill between us and home, a number of small figures moving about and hurrying forward. Certainly they were Boers. There was not an instant to lose. We started immediately on our return journey.

As we approached the hill, I saw a cluster of Boers on the crest. Suddenly three wheeled things appeared among them, and instantly bright flashes of light opened and shut ten or twelve times. A huge white ball of smoke sprang into being and tore out into a cone, only a few feet, it seemed, above my head. It was shrapnel—the first I had ever seen in war, and very nearly the last! The steel sides of the truck tanged with a patter of bullets. There was a crash from the front of the train, and a series of sharp explosions.

The railway line curved round the base of the hill on a steep down



gradient, and our pace increased enormously. The Boer artillery (two guns and a pom-pom) had time for only one discharge before we were round the corner out of their sight. It had crossed my mind that there must be a trap farther on. I was about to mention this to Haldane when suddenly there was a tremendous shock; he and I and all the soldiers in the truck were pitched head over heels on to its floor. The armoured train, travelling at not less than forty miles an hour, had been thrown off the rails.

In our truck no one was seriously hurt. From the enemy's hill, about twelve hundred yards behind us, came almost immediately an accurate and heavy rifle fire. The bullets whistled overhead and rang and splattered on the steel plates like hail. Haldane and I debated what to do. It was agreed that he with the little naval gun and his company of Dublin Fusiliers in the rear truck should endeavour to keep down the enemy's firing, and that I should go forward to find out the extent of the damage.

I nipped out of the truck and ran to the head of the train, which had been made up with the engine in the middle, three trucks being pushed before it and three drawn behind. The engine and three rear trucks were undamaged, but the three forward trucks were off the rails. One truck had turned completely head over heels, killing and terribly injuring some of the men; two others were derailed.

Behind the overturned trucks infantrymen, bruised, shaken and some severely injured, had found a temporary shelter. The enemy's fire was continuous, and soon there mingled with the rifles the bang of the field guns and the near explosion of their shells. We were in the toils of the enemy.

The overturned truck lay clear of the track, but the other two, one still upright, and one on its side, lay jammed against each other in disorder, across the rails, blocking the homeward path for the rest of the train. The rails, however, appeared to be intact.

I conceived the idea of using the engine as a ram, to pull and push the two wrecked trucks clear of the line. Captain Haldane agreed to my proposal and undertook to keep the enemy hotly engaged meanwhile.

I was very lucky in the hour that followed not to be hit. It was necessary for me to be almost continuously moving up and down the



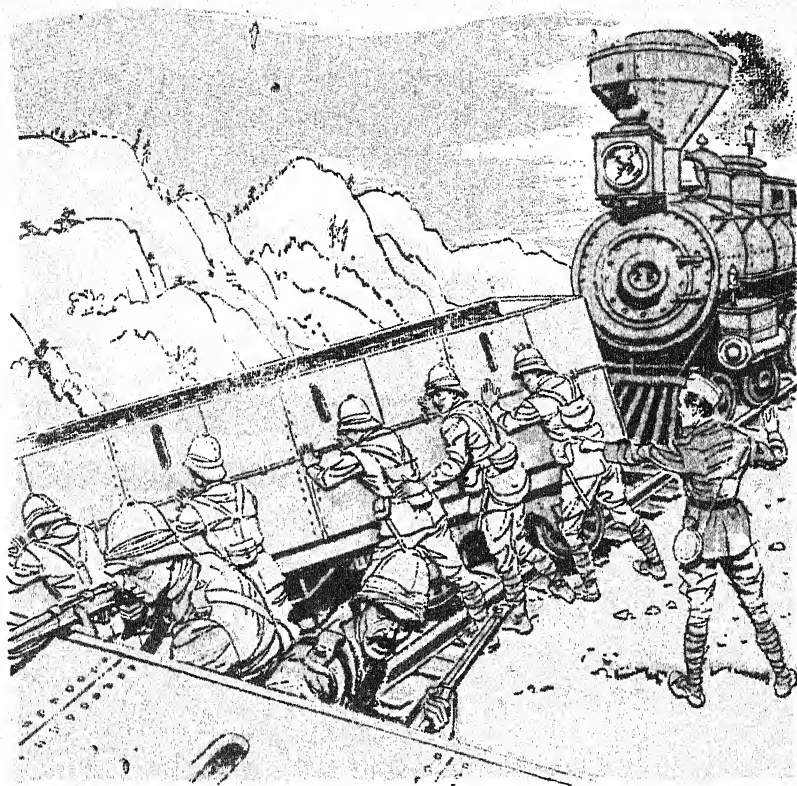
train or standing in the open, directing the engine driver. First the engine had to tug the truck, which was standing half off the rails, backward until it was clear of the other wreckage, and then throw it completely off the rails. The weight of the iron truck half on the sleepers was enormous, and the engine wheels skidded vainly several times. At last the truck was drawn sufficiently far back, and I called for volunteers to overturn it from the side, while the engine pushed it from the end. The truck heeled over farther under their pressure. Safety and success appeared in sight. The engine gave a shove at the right moment; the truck fell off the line, and the track seemed clear.

Then followed one of the bitterest disappointments of my life.

The footplate, a platform extending about six inches out from the floor of the engine cab, had jammed against the corner of the newly overturned truck. It did not seem safe to push very hard, lest the engine itself should be derailed. Time after time we moved back a yard or two and butted forward at the obstruction. Each time it moved a little, but soon it was evident that the newly derailed car had become jammed in a T-shaped position with the one off the line ahead of it, and the more the engine pushed, the greater became the block.

It occurred to me now that the jammed trucks might be loosened by pulling backward. However, the coupling chains of the engine would not reach by five or six inches those of the overturned truck. By a solitary gleam of good luck, a spare coupling was found. The engine hauled at the wreckage and before the chain parted pulled it about a yard backward and off the track. Now surely the line was clear at last. But again the corner of the engine footplate jammed with the corner of the truck, and again we came to a jarring halt.

The excitement of the work absorbed me completely. I remember thinking that it was like working in front of an iron target at a rifle-range. We struggled for seventy minutes among these clanging, rending iron boxes, amid the repeated explosions of shells and the ceaseless hammering of bullets, and with only five or six inches of twisted ironwork to make the difference between danger, captivity and shame on the one hand, and safety, freedom and triumph on the other. At last, as the artillery firing steadily increased and the second gun came into action from the opposite flank, I decided to run a great risk which could mean



derailing the engine and sealing our doom. The engine was backed to its fullest extent and driven full tilt at the obstruction. There was a harsh crunching tear, the engine reeled on the rails, and as the obstructing truck reared upward ground its way past and gained the homeward side, free and safe. But our three remaining trucks were still the wrong side of the obstruction, which had fallen back into place after the engine had passed. What were we to do? There would be just room for the trucks, which were narrower than the engine, to slip past the obstruction. Could we then drag them up by hand?

Captain Haldane accepted the plan. He ordered his men to climb out of their steel pen and try to push it towards the engine. The plan was

sound, but the fire was so hot and the confusion so great, that the men drifted away from the exposed side of the heavy truck. The enemy, relieved of our counter-fire, were now plainly visible, firing furiously. We then agreed that the engine should go slowly homeward with all the wounded, who were now numerous, and that the Fusiliers should retreat on foot, sheltering themselves behind the slow-moving engine. Upward of forty persons, of whom the greater part were streaming with blood, were crowded on the engine and its tender, and we began to move. I was in the cab, directing the engine driver. The shells burst all round, some striking the engine. The pace increased, the infantry outside began to lag and soon were three hundred yards behind. At last I forced the engine driver to stop. Close at hand was the bridge across the Blue Krantz River, a considerable span. I told the engine driver to cross the bridge and wait on the other side, while I went back to bring along Captain Haldane and his Fusiliers.

But while these events had been taking place everything else had been in movement. I had not retraced my steps two hundred yards when, instead of Haldane and his company, two figures in plain clothes appeared upon the line. "Boers!" My mind retains its impression of these tall figures, clad in dark, flapping clothes, with slouch, storm-driven hats, poising on their levelled rifles hardly a hundred yards away. I turned and ran back towards the engine, the two Boers firing as I ran. Their bullets, sucking to right and left, seemed to miss only by inches. We were in a small cutting with banks about six feet high on either side. I flung myself against one bank. It gave no cover. Another glance at the two figures; one was now kneeling to aim. Movement seemed the only chance. Again I darted forward: again two soft kisses sucked in the air; but nothing struck me. This could not endure. I must get out of the cutting—that damnable corridor! I jiggled to the left, and scrambled up the bank. The earth sprang up beside me. I got through the wire fence unhurt. Outside the cutting was a tiny depression. I crouched in this, struggling to get my breath again.

About two hundred yards away was the rocky gorge of the Blue Krantz River, offering plenty of cover. I determined to make a dash for it. I rose to my feet. Suddenly on the other side of the railway, separated from me by the rails and two wire fences, I saw a horseman galloping

furiously, a tall, dark figure, holding his rifle in his right hand. He pulled up his horse almost in its own length and shaking the rifle at me shouted a loud command. We were forty yards apart. That morning I had taken with me, correspondent-status notwithstanding, my Mauser pistol. I thought I could kill this man. I put my hand to my belt, the pistol was not there. When engaged in clearing the line, I had taken it off. I was quite unarmed. Meanwhile, the Boer had covered me with his rifle. His horse stood stock still, so did he, and so did I. I looked towards the river. The Boer continued to look along his sights. I thought there was absolutely no chance of escape. If he fired he would surely hit me, so I held up my hands and surrendered myself a prisoner of war. My captor lowered his rifle and beckoned to me to come across to him. I obeyed. At his side I tramped back towards the spot where I had left Captain Haldane and his company. They were already prisoners. We found ourselves in the midst of many hundreds of mounted Boers.

Such is the episode of the armoured train and the story of my capture on November 15, 1899.

It was not until three years later, when the Boer generals visited England to ask for some loan or assistance on behalf of their devastated country, that I was introduced at a private luncheon to their leader, General Botha. We talked of the war and I briefly told the story of my capture. Botha listened in silence; then he said, "Don't you recognize me? It was I who took you prisoner? I, myself," and his bright eyes twinkled. At the time of our adventure he had entered upon the invasion of Natal as a private burgher; his own disapproval of the war had excluded him from any high command at its outset. This was his first action. But as a simple private serving in the ranks he had galloped on ahead and in front of the whole Boer forces in the ardour of pursuit. Thus we met.

Few men that I have known have interested me more than Louis Botha. An acquaintance formed in strange circumstances and upon an almost unbelievable introduction ripened into a friendship which I greatly valued. I saw in this grand, rugged figure, the Father of his country, the wise and profound statesman, the farmer-warrior, the crafty hunter of the wilderness, the deep, sure man of solitude.

But let me return to my story.

It had begun to rain. As I sat drenched and miserable on the ground with the prisoners and some mortally-wounded men, I cursed, not only my luck, but my own decision. I could quite decently have gone off upon the engine. I had not helped anybody by attempting to return to the Company. I had needlessly involved myself in a useless and hopeless disaster. I had cut myself out of the whole of this exciting war with all its boundless possibilities of adventure and advancement. I meditated blankly upon the sour rewards of virtue. Yet this misfortune was to lay the foundations of my later life. I was not to be done out of the campaign. I was not to languish as a prisoner. I was to escape, and by escaping was to gain a public reputation or notoriety which made me well known henceforward among my countrymen and acceptable as a political candidate in a great many constituencies.

But these events and possibilities were hidden from me, and it was in dudgeon that I ranged myself in the line of prisoners before the swiftly erected headquarters tent. My gloomy reflections took a sharper and a darker turn when I found myself picked out from the other captive officers and ordered to stand apart. I had enough military law to know that a civilian in a half uniform who has taken an active and prominent part in a fight, even if he has not fired a shot himself, is liable to be shot at once by drumhead court-martial. None of the armies in the Great War would have wasted ten minutes upon the business. I therefore occupied myself in thinking out what answers I should make to the various short, sharp questions which might soon be addressed to me, and what sort of appearance I could keep up if I were soon and suddenly told that my hour had come.

After about a quarter of an hour I was much relieved when I was curtly told to rejoin the others. Indeed I felt quite joyful when a few minutes later a Boer field cornet came out of the tent and said, "We are not going to let you go, old chappie, although you are a correspondent. We don't catch the son of a lord every day." I need really never have been alarmed. To the Boer mind the destruction of a white man's life, even in war, was a lamentable and shocking event. They were the most good-hearted enemy I have ever fought against in the four continents in which it has been my fortune to see active service.

So it was settled that we were all to be sent to Pretoria as prisoners of war.

Prisoner of war! That is a melancholy state. You are in the power of your enemy. You owe your life to his humanity, and your daily bread to his compassion. You must obey his orders, await his pleasure, possess your soul in patience. Meanwhile the war is going on, opportunities for action and adventure are slipping away. The days are very long. Hours crawl like paralytic centipedes.

Moreover, the whole atmosphere of prison, even the most easy and best-regulated prison, is odious. Companions quarrel about trifles and get the least possible pleasure from each other's society. You feel a sense of constant humiliation in being confined to a narrow space, fenced in by railings and wire, watched by armed men, and webbed about with a tangle of regulations and restrictions. I certainly hated every minute of my captivity more than I have ever hated any other period in my whole life. Luckily it was very short.

During the first three weeks of my captivity in the State Model Schools, I was engaged in arguing with the Boer authorities that they should release me as a press correspondent. They replied that I had forfeited my noncombatant status by the part I had taken in the armoured-train fight. The Natal newspapers, captured by the Boers, had contained glowing accounts of my activities, and attributed the escape of the engine and the wounded entirely to me. The Boers, therefore, contended that I must be treated as a prisoner of war. As soon as I learned of this decision, I resolved to escape. I shall transcribe what I wrote immediately after the event.

"The State Model Schools stood in the midst of a quadrangle and were surrounded on two sides by an iron grille and on two by a corrugated-iron fence about ten feet high. These boundaries offered little obstacle in themselves; but the fact that they were guarded on the inside at fifty-yard intervals by sentries, armed with rifle and revolver, made them well-nigh insuperable.

"After continual watching, it was discovered that at certain moments on their beats the sentries were unable to see the top of a few yards of the wall near a small lavatory on the eastern side. Electric lights in the middle of the quadrangle brilliantly lighted the whole place, but this

wall was in shadow. To pass the two sentries it was necessary to hit off the exact moment when both their backs should be turned together. After the wall was scaled we should be in the garden of the villa next door. There the plan came to an end. How to pass unnoticed through the town, how to cover the two hundred and eighty miles to the Portuguese East Africa frontier, were questions which would arise later.

"I was determined that nothing should stop my taking the plunge. One evening, after careful preparation with my fellow conspirators, Captain Haldane and another officer, I strolled across the quadrangle and secreted myself in the lavatory. Through an aperture I watched the sentries. For some time they remained stolid and obstructive. Then all of a sudden one turned and walked up to his comrade, and they began to talk. Their backs were turned.

"Now or never! I stood on a ledge, seized the top of the wall with my hands and drew myself up. Twice I let myself down again in sickly hesitation. If the sentries happened to look, whether they would challenge or fire depended entirely upon their dispositions. With a third resolve I scrambled up and over. My waistcoat got entangled with the ornamental metalwork on the top. I had to pause for an appreciable moment to extricate myself. In this posture I had one parting glimpse of the sentries still talking; one of them was lighting his cigarette, and I remember as a distinct impression the glow on the inside of his hands. Then I lowered myself lightly down into the adjoining garden and crouched among the shrubs. I was free! The first step had been taken, and it was irrevocable. It now remained to await the arrival of my comrades. The bushes in the garden gave a good deal of cover, and in the moonlight their shadows fell dark on the ground. I lay here for an hour in great impatience and anxiety. Where were the others?

"Suddenly I heard voices from within the quadrangle. Two officers were walking up and down inside, jabbering Latin words, laughing and talking all manner of nonsense—amid which I caught my name. I risked a cough. One of the officers immediately began to chatter alone. The other said, slowly and clearly, 'They cannot get out. The sentry suspects. It's all up. Can you get back again?'

"Now all my fears fell from me. To go back was impossible. I could not hope to climb the wall unnoticed. Fate pointed onward. Besides, I







said to myself, 'Of course I shall be recaptured, but I will at least have a run for my money.' I said to the officers, 'I shall go on alone.'

"The gate which led into the road was only a few yards from another sentry. I said to myself, '*Toujours de l'audace*,' put my hat on my head, strode into the middle of the garden, walked past the windows of the house without any attempt at concealment, and so went through the gate and turned to the left. I passed the sentry at less than five yards. Most of them knew me by sight. Whether he looked at me or not I do not know, for I never turned my head. I restrained with the utmost difficulty an impulse to run. But after walking a hundred yards and hearing no challenge, I knew that the second obstacle had been surmounted. I was at large in Pretoria.

"I walked on leisurely through the night, humming a tune and choosing the middle of the road. The streets were full of burghers, but they paid no attention to me. Gradually I reached the suburbs, and on a little bridge I sat down to reflect and consider. I was in the heart of the enemy's country. I knew no one to whom I could apply for succour. Nearly three hundred miles stretched between me and Delagoa Bay. My escape must be known at dawn. Pursuit would be immediate. Yet all exits were barred. The town was picketed, the country was patrolled, the trains were searched, the line was guarded. I wore a civilian brown flannel suit. I had seventy-five pounds in my pocket and four slabs of chocolate, but the compass and the map which might have guided me, the meat lozenges which should have sustained me, were in my friends' pockets. Worst of all, I could not speak a word of Dutch or Kaffir, and how was I to get food or direction?

"But when hope had departed, fear had gone as well. I formed a plan. I would find the Delagoa Bay Railway. Without map or compass, I must follow that in spite of the pickets. After walking south for half a mile I struck the railway. Was it the line to Delagoa Bay? I could not be sure, but I resolved none the less to follow it. The night was delicious. A wild feeling of exhilaration took hold of me. At any rate, I was free, if only for an hour.

"The fascination of the adventure grew. Unless the stars in their courses fought for me, I could not escape. Where, then, was the need of caution? I marched briskly along the line. Here and there the lights of

a picket fire gleamed. Every bridge had its watchers. But I passed them all, making very short detours, taking scarcely any precautions. Perhaps that was the reason I succeeded.

"As I walked I extended my plan. I could not march three hundred miles to the frontier. I would board a train in motion and hide on the roof, on the couplings—anywhere. After walking for two hours I perceived the signal lights of a station. I circled it and hid in the ditch by the track about two hundred yards beyond the platform. An hour passed. I began to grow impatient. Suddenly I heard the approaching whistle, and great yellow headlights flashed into view. The train waited five minutes at the station, and started again. I crouched by the track. The train gathered speed sooner than I had expected. The flaring lights drew swiftly near. The black profile of the engine, the engine driver silhouetted against his furnace glow, the clouds of steam rushed past. Then I hurled myself on the trucks, clutched, missed, clutched again, grasped some sort of handhold. I was swung off my feet—my toes bumping on the line, and with a struggle seated myself on the couplings of the fifth truck from the front of the train. It was a goods-train, and the trucks were full of soft sacks covered with coal dust. They were, in fact, bags filled with empty coal bags going back to their colliery. I crawled on top and burrowed in among them. They were warm and comfortable. Where was the train going? Would it be searched? What should I do in the morning? Ah, never mind that. Sufficient for the night was the luck thereof. I resolved to sleep.

"I woke before daybreak with all feelings of exhilaration gone. I must leave the train, drink at a pool, and find some hiding-place while it was still dark. I could not risk being unloaded with the coal bags. Another night I would board another train. I crawled from my cosy hiding-place. The train was running at a fair speed. I took hold of the iron handle at the back of the truck and sprang. My feet struck the ground in two gigantic strides, and the next instant I was sprawling in the ditch considerably shaken but unhurt. It was still dark. I was in the middle of a wide valley, surrounded by low hills, and carpeted with high grass drenched in dew. I soon found a clear pool. I was very thirsty, but long after I had quenched my thirst, I continued to drink, that I might have sufficient for the whole day.

"Presently the dawn began to break. I saw with relief that the railway ran steadily towards the sunrise. I had taken the right line, after all.

"Having drunk my fill, I set out to find some hiding-place, and as it became broad daylight I entered a small grove of trees which grew on the side of a deep ravine. Here I resolved to wait till dusk. It was now four o'clock. Fourteen hours lay between me and night. By ten o'clock the heat was oppressive. My sole companion was a giant vulture, who manifested an extravagant interest in my condition, and made hideous and ominous gurglings from time to time.

"The elation and the excitement of the previous night had burnt away, and a chilling reaction followed. I found no comfort in any of the philosophical ideas which some men parade in their hours of ease and safety. They seemed only fair-weather friends. I realized with awful force that without the assistance of that High Power which interferes in the eternal sequence of causes and effects more often than we always admit, I could never succeed. I prayed long and earnestly for help and guidance. My prayer, as it seems to me, was swiftly and wonderfully answered."

I WROTE these lines many years ago while the impression of the adventure was strong upon me. Then I could tell no more. To have done so would have compromised the liberty and perhaps the lives of those who had helped me. I can now relate the events which changed my nearly hopeless position into one of superior advantage.

I made my way to the place where I had seen the trains crawling so slowly up the slope, and soon found a point where the curve of the track fulfilled all the conditions of my plan. Here, behind a little bush, I sat down and waited hopefully. An hour passed; two hours; three hours—and yet no train. My plan began to crumble. Was it possible that no trains ran on this part of the line during the dark hours? Between twelve and one in the morning I lost patience and started along the track, resolved to cover at any rate ten or fifteen miles of my journey. I did not make much progress. Every bridge was guarded by armed men; the veld was bathed in the bright rays of the full moon. I had to make wide circuits and even to creep along the ground. I fell into bogs and swamps, brushed through high grass dripping with dew and waded

across the streams over which the bridges carried the railway. I was soon drenched to the wais. I had been able to take very little exercise during my month's imprisonment and tired quickly. Presently I approached a station. Laid up on the sidings were three long goods-trains, motionless, confirming my fears that traffic was not maintained by night on this part of the line. Where, then, was my plan which had looked so fine and sure?

There was nothing for it but to plod on—but in an increasingly purposeless and hopeless manner. I felt very miserable when I saw here and there the lights of houses and thought of the warmth and comfort within them, but knew that they meant only danger to me. Out in the darkness to my left gleamed the fires of a Kaffir kraal. I had heard that the Kaffirs hated the Boers and were friendly to the British. They might be induced to help me. I set out towards the fires.

I must have walked a mile or so in this resolve before a realization of its imprudence overtook me. I retraced my steps perhaps half the distance. Then I stopped and sat down, completely baffled, destitute of any idea what to do or where to turn. Suddenly without the slightest reason all my doubts disappeared. It was certainly by no process of logic that they were dispelled. I just felt quite clear that I would go to the Kaffir kraal. I had sometimes in former years held a "Planchette" pencil and written while others had touched my wrist or hand. I acted in exactly the same subconscious manner now.

I walked on rapidly, and after some time perceived that the fires were not from a Kaffir kraal, but from the furnaces of the power plant of a coal mine. Hard by stood a small but substantial stone house.

I halted to survey this scene and to resolve my action. It was still possible to turn back. On the other hand, here was a chance. I had heard it said before I escaped that in the mining district a certain number of English residents had been suffered to remain in order to keep the mines working. Had I been led to one of these? Did this house which frowned dark and inscrutable contain a Briton or a Boer? A friend or a foe? The odds were heavy against me. With reluctant steps I advanced towards the silent house, and struck with my fist upon the door.

There was a pause. I knocked again, and an upper window opened.

"*Wer ist da?*" cried a man's voice.

I felt the shock of disappointment and consternation to my fingers.

"I want help; I have had an accident," I replied.

Some muttering followed. Then I heard steps descending the stairs. The door was opened abruptly. In the darkness of the passage stood a tall man hastily attired, with a pale face and dark moustache.

"What do you want?" he said, this time in English.

I had now to think of something to say. I wanted above all to get into parley with this man, to get matters in such a state that instead of raising an alarm and summoning others he would discuss things quietly.

"I am a burgher," I began. "I have had an accident. I was going to join my commando at Komati Poort. I have fallen off the train. We were skylarking. I have been unconscious for hours. I think I have dislocated my shoulder." It is astonishing how one thinks of these things. This story leaped out as if I had learned it by heart. Yet I had not the slightest idea what I was going to say next.

The stranger regarded me intently and, after some hesitation, said at length, "Well, come in." I walked past him and entered. He pointed into a dark room. I wondered if it was to be my prison. He lit a lamp. I was in a small room, evidently a dining-room and office in one. I noticed, besides the large table, a roll desk. On his end of the table my host laid a revolver.

"I think I'd like to know a little more about this accident of yours," he said, after a considerable pause.

"I think," I replied, "I had better tell you the truth."

"I think you had," he said, slowly.

So I took the plunge and threw all I had upon the board: "I am Winston Churchill, war correspondent of the *Morning Post*. I escaped last night from Pretoria. I am making my way to the frontier. I have plenty of money. Will you help me?"

There was another long pause. My companion rose from the table slowly and locked the door. After this act, which struck me as ambiguous, he advanced upon me and suddenly held out his hand.

"Thank God you have come here! It is the only house for twenty miles where you would not have been handed over. We are British here, and we will see you through."

It is easier to recall across the gulf of years the spasm of relief which swept over me, than it is to describe it. I felt like a drowning man pulled out of the water and informed he has won the Derby!

My host now introduced himself as John Howard, manager of the Transvaal Collieries. He had become a naturalized burgher of the Transvaal some years before the war. But out of consideration for his British race he had not been called up to fight against the British. He had been allowed to remain with one or two others on the mine, keeping it pumped out and in good order until coal cutting could be resumed. He had with him four British subjects who had been allowed to remain only upon giving their parole to observe strict neutrality. He himself as burgher of the Transvaal Republic would be guilty of treason in harbouring me, and liable to be shot.

"Never mind," he said, "we will fix it up somehow. They have the hue and cry out for you all along the line and all over the district."

I said that I did not wish to compromise him. Let him give me food, a pistol, a guide, if possible a pony, and I would make my own way to the sea.

He would not hear of it. He would fix up something. But he enjoined the utmost caution. Spies were everywhere. He had two Dutch servant-maids actually sleeping in the house, and there were many Kaffirs employed about the mine. He became very thoughtful.

Then: "But you are famishing."

I did not contradict him. In a moment he had hustled off into the kitchen, telling me meanwhile to help myself from a whisky bottle and soda-water machine. He returned with the best part of a cold leg of mutton and various other delectable commodities, and, leaving me to do full justice to these, he let himself out of the house by a back door.

Nearly an hour later he returned. "It's all right," he said. "I have seen the men, and they are all for it. We must put you down in the pit tonight, and there you will have to stay till we can see how to get you out of the country. One difficulty," he said, "will be the food. The Dutch girl sees every mouthful I eat. The cook will want to know what has happened to her leg of mutton. I shall have to think it all out during the night. You must get down in the pit at once. We'll make you comfortable enough."

Accordingly, I followed my host across a little yard to the mine shaft. A door was opened and I entered the cage. Down we shot into the bowels of the earth. At the bottom were two Scottish miners with lanterns, a mattress and blankets. We walked for some time through the pitchy labyrinth and finally stopped in a sort of chamber where the air was cool and fresh. Here Mr. Howard handed me a couple of candles, a bottle of whisky and a box of cigars.

"Don't you move from here, whatever happens," was his parting injunction. My four friends trooped off with their lanterns, and I was left alone. Viewed from the velvety darkness of the pit, life seemed bathed in rosy light. After the perplexity and despair through which I had passed I now saw myself rejoining the army with a real exploit to my credit, and in that full enjoyment of freedom and keen pursuit of adventure dear to the heart of youth.

WHEN I awoke from a sound sleep, the afternoon must have been far advanced. I searched for the candle, but could feel it nowhere. I did not know what pitfalls these mining galleries might contain, so I thought it better to lie quiet on my mattress and await developments. Several hours passed before the faint gleam of a lantern showed that someone was coming. It proved to be Mr. Howard himself, armed with a chicken and other good things. He also brought several books. He asked me why I had not lighted my candle. I said I couldn't find it.

"Didn't you put it under the mattress?" he asked.

"No."

"Then the rats must have got it."

Several times later during my stay in the mine I was to be awakened suddenly with a feeling of movement about me. Luckily for me, I have no horror of rats as such, and being reassured by their evident timidity, I was not particularly uneasy. All the same, these three days were not among the most pleasant which my memory re-illumines. The patter of little feet and a perceptible sense of stir and scurry were continuous. Once I was waked up from a doze by one actually galloping across me. On the candle being lighted these beings became invisible.

On the second day Mr. Howard announced that the hue and cry about my escape seemed to be dying away. The fact that there were a



number of English remaining in the mining region had indicated it as a likely place for me to have turned to, but, no trace of the fugitive having been discovered, the talk among the Boer officials was now that I must be hiding at the house of some British sympathizer in Pretoria. In these circumstances Mr. Howard thought that I might shift to quarters above the ground. Accordingly, I had a fine stroll in the glorious fresh air and moonlight, and moved in behind packing-cases in the office. Here I remained for three more days.

On the sixteenth, the fifth day of escape, Mr. Howard informed me he had made a plan to get me out of the country. A Dutchman, Burger by name, was sending a consignment of wool to Delagoa Bay on the nineteenth. This gentleman, who was well-disposed to the British, had been made a party to our secret, and was willing to assist. The bales of wool could be so packed in the railway truck as to leave a small place in the centre in which I could be concealed. A tarpaulin would be fastened over each truck after it had been loaded; it was unlikely that it would be removed at the frontier. Did I agree to take this chance?

I was more worried about this than almost anything that had happened to me so far in my adventure. The idea of being perfectly helpless, absolutely at the caprice of a searching party at the frontier, was profoundly harassing. I should have been still more anxious if I could have read the description of myself with the reward for my recapture "dead or alive" which was now widely distributed. In the end I accepted the proposal of my generous rescuer, and arrangements were made.

At two o'clock on the morning of the nineteenth, I waited, fully dressed. My host appeared. He beckoned. Not a word was spoken. He led the way through the front office to the railway siding where three large trucks stood. Three figures, evidently the English miners, were strolling about in the moonlight. A gang of Kaffirs was lifting an enormous bale into the rearmost truck. Howard strolled along to the first car and pointed. I nipped up and saw a hole between the wool bales and the end of the truck, just wide enough to squeeze into. From this a narrow tunnel led through the bales into the centre of the truck. Here was a space wide enough to lie in, high enough to sit up in. In this I took up my abode.



Three or four hours later, there came the noise of an approaching engine; then the bumping and banging of coupling up. After a pause, we started rumbling off on our journey into the unknown.

I took stock of my new abode and its resources. There was a revolver. This was a moral support, though it was not easy to see in what way it could be helpful. There were two roast chickens, some slices of meat, a loaf of bread, a melon and three bottles of cold tea. The journey to the sea was not expected to take more than sixteen hours, but no one could tell what delay might occur to ordinary commercial traffic in time of war.

All day long and most of the following day we travelled eastward through the Transvaal. Late in the afternoon of the second day we reached the dreaded Komati Poort. Peeping through a chink, I could see this was a considerable place. Numbers of people were moving about. There were many voices and much shouting. I retreated into the very centre of my fastness, and covering myself up with a piece of sacking lay flat on the floor of the truck and awaited developments with a beating heart.

Three or four hours passed; I did not know whether we had been searched or not. Several times people had passed up and down the train talking in Dutch. But no special examination seemed to have been made of the truck. Meanwhile darkness had come on, and I had to resign myself to an indefinite continuance of my uncertainties. It was tantalizing to be held so long in jeopardy after all these hundreds of miles had been accomplished, and I was now within a few hundred yards of the frontier. I wondered about the dangers of snoring. But I slept without mishap.

We were still stationary when I awoke. Perhaps they were searching the train so thoroughly that there was consequently a great delay! Or perhaps we were forgotten and would be left on the siding for days. I was greatly tempted to peer out, but I resisted. At last we were coupled up, and almost immediately started. If I had been right in thinking that the station in which we had passed the night was Komati Poort, I was already in Portuguese territory. But perhaps I had made a mistake. Perhaps there was still another station before the frontier. At the next station I peered through my chink, and saw the uniform caps of the

Portuguese officials on the platform. I restrained all expression of my joy until we moved on again. Then, as we rumbled and banged along, I pushed my head out of the tarpaulin and sang and shouted and crowed at the top of my voice. Indeed, I was so carried away that I fired my revolver two or three times in the air as a *feu de joie*. None of these follies led to any evil results.

It was late in the afternoon when we reached Lourenço Marques. My train ran into a yard, and a crowd of Kaffirs advanced to unload it. I thought the moment had now come for me to leave my hiding-place, in which I had passed nearly three anxious and uncomfortable days. I slipped out and mingling unnoticed with the Kaffirs and loafers in the yard—which my slovenly and unkempt appearance well fitted me to do—I strolled my way towards the gates and to the streets.

Burgener was waiting outside the gates. We exchanged glances. He turned and walked off, and I followed twenty yards behind. We walked through several streets; presently he stopped and stood for a moment gazing up at the roof of the opposite house. I looked in the same direction, and there—blest vision!—I saw the gay colours of the Union Jack. It was the British Consulate.

The secretary of the British Consul evidently did not expect my arrival. "Be off," he said. "The Consul cannot see you today. Come to his office at nine tomorrow, if you want anything."

At this I became so angry, and repeated so loudly that I insisted on seeing the Consul personally at once, that that gentleman himself looked out of the window and finally came down to the door and asked me my name. From that moment every resource of hospitality and welcome was at my disposal. A hot bath, clean clothing, an excellent dinner, means of telegraphing—all I could want. Happily, the weekly steamer was leaving for Durban that very evening; in fact, it might almost be said it ran in connection with my train. On this steamer I decided to embark.

The news of my arrival spread like wildfire through the town, and while we were at dinner the Consul was at first disturbed to see a group of strange figures in the garden. These, however, turned out to be Englishmen fully armed who had hurried up to the Consulate determined to resist any attempt at my recapture by the many Boers and Boer

sympathizers at Lourenço Marques. Accordingly, under a heavy patriotic escort I marched safely through the streets to the quay.

I reached Durban to find myself a popular hero. I was received as if I had won a great victory. The harbour was decorated with flags. Bands and crowds thronged the quays. The Admiral, the General, the Mayor pressed on board to grasp my hand. I was nearly torn to pieces by enthusiastic kindness. I was carried on the shoulders of the crowd to the steps of the town hall, where nothing would content them but a speech, which after a becoming reluctance I was induced to deliver. Sheaves of telegrams from all parts of the world poured in upon me, and I started that night for the army in a blaze of triumph.

Here, too, I was received with the greatest goodwill. I took up my quarters within a hundred yards of the spot where I had a little more than a month before been taken prisoner, and there, in the company of many friends, I celebrated my good fortune and Christmas Eve.

I FOUND that during the weeks I had been a prisoner of war my name had resounded at home. The British nation was smarting under a series of military reverses, and the news of my outwitting the Boers was received with enormous and no doubt disproportionate satisfaction. This produced the inevitable reaction, and an undercurrent of disparagement, equally undeserved, began to mingle with the gushing tributes. Criticism was also excited by a telegram which I sent to the *Morning Post* from Durban.

"Reviewing the whole situation," I wrote, "it is foolish not to recognize that we are fighting a formidable and terrible adversary. We must face the facts. The individual Boer, mounted in suitable country, is worth from three to five regular soldiers."

These unpalatable truths were resented. Quoth the *Morning Leader*: "We have received no confirmation of the statement that Mr. Winston Churchill has been appointed to command the troops in South Africa, with General Sir Redvers Buller, V.C., as his Chief of Staff."

Unhappily this was sarcasm. However, my opinions were vindicated by events. More than a quarter of a million British soldiers, or five times the total Boer forces, stood on South African soil before success was won.

While my personal fortunes had been undergoing these vicissitudes,

military disasters in South Africa had aroused the British nation. Sir Redvers Buller had been once repulsed in an attempt to relieve Ladysmith. Meanwhile, the German Emperor, in a curiously friendly mood, had sent a personal message to Queen Victoria, saying: "I cannot sit on the safety-valve for ever. My people demand intervention. You must get a victory. I advise you to send out Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener." Whether upon this suggestion or otherwise, Lord Roberts was, on December 16, appointed to the chief command, with Lord Kitchener as Chief of Staff. Reinforcements, comprising the entire British army outside India with powerful volunteer additions from home and the colonies, were set in motion towards South Africa. Buller, strongly reinforced, was assigned the command in Natal with orders to persevere in the relief of Ladysmith, while the main army was to advance northward from the Cape Colony to relieve Kimberley and capture Bloemfontein.

After Sir Redvers Buller had examined me at length upon the conditions prevailing in the Transvaal, he consented to my request for a commission in one of the irregular corps which were being improvised—but with the condition that, since I was still under contract with the *Morning Post*, I was to receive no pay for my army service. To this irregular arrangement I made haste to agree.

Behold me, then, restored to the army with a lieutenant's commission in the South African Light Horse, a regiment of six squadrons and over seven hundred mounted men, raised in the Cape Colony by Colonel Julian Byng, an officer from whom great things were rightly expected. I stitched my badges of rank to my khaki coat and stuck the long plume of feathers from the tail of the *sakabulu* bird in my hat, and lived from day to day in perfect happiness.

Meanwhile, Sir Redvers Buller, strongly reinforced, made ponderous movements towards the relief of Ladysmith. Several serious reverses were suffered as a result of the leisureliness which marred all Buller's movements. However, in spite of the vexatious course of the war, the two months' fighting for the relief of Ladysmith make one of the happiest memories of my life. Although our irregular cavalry was engaged with the enemy on at least three days out of five, our losses were not severe. Day after day we rode out in the early morning, galloped round

or clambered up the rocky hills, caught glimpses of darting, fleeting Boer horsemen in the distance, heard a few bullets whistle, had a few careful shots and came safe home to a good dinner and cheery, keenly intelligent companions. Meanwhile I dispatched a continual stream of letters and cables to the *Morning Post*. Altogether there was an air of grace and amenity about this war singularly lacking fifteen years later on the Western Front.

Buller now began his fourth attempt to relieve Ladysmith; the garrison was on starvation rations, and fast devouring its horses and mules. Sir George White declared that he could hold out, but he had no longer any mobility to co-operate with us. He could just sit still and starve as slowly as possible. The outlook was therefore bleak.

After two weeks of heavy and confused fighting, on February 27 the Natal army delivered its final attack. The last row of hills between us and Ladysmith had fallen. Mounting in haste we galloped out, hoping to pursue the enemy. The Commander-in-Chief met us and sternly ordered us back. "Damn pursuit!" were said to be the historic words he uttered on this occasion. As one might say, "Damn reward for sacrifices! Damn the recovery of debts overdue!"

The next morning we wended up and across the battle-scarred heights and debouched upon the open plain which led to Ladysmith six miles away. The Boers were in full retreat, and the dust of the wagon-trains trekking northward rose from many quarters of the horizon. The order "Damn pursuit!" still held. All day we chafed and fumed, and it was not until evening that two squadrons of the South African Light Horse were allowed to brush through the crumbling rear guards and ride into Ladysmith. I rode with these two squadrons, and galloped across the scrub-dotted plain, fired at only by a couple of Boer guns. Suddenly from the brushwood up rose gaunt figures waving hands of welcome. On we pressed, and at the head of a battered street of tin-roofed houses met Sir George White on horseback, faultlessly attired. Then we all rode together into the long-beleaguered, almost starved-out Ladysmith. It was a thrilling moment.

I dined with the Headquarters staff that night. Jealously preserved bottles of champagne were uncorked. The last trek ox had been slain in honour of the occasion. Our pallid and emaciated hosts showed

subdued contentment. Having travelled so far and by such rough and devious routes, I rejoiced to be in Ladysmith at last.

THE MAIN force of the British army, meanwhile, had consolidated its strength in the Cape Colony, and, under the command of Lord Roberts, had advanced as far as Bloemfontein, some three hundred miles to the south of Pretoria. This, I saw, was now to be the decisive and main theatre of the war. On the free and easy footing which had been accorded me since my escape from Pretoria, it was not difficult for me to obtain indefinite leave of absence from the South African Light Horse, and without resigning my commission to transfer my activities as a correspondent to Lord Roberts's army. The Army Headquarters had lain for two months in Bloemfontein, and when I arrived there, great was the bustle before the advance. I was equipped by the *Morning Post* on a munificent scale with good horses and transport.

Then began a jolly march, occupying about six weeks and covering in that period about five hundred miles. The wonderful climate of South Africa, the magnificent scale of its landscape, the life of unceasing movement and of continuous incident made an impression on my mind which even now recurs with a sense of freshness and invigoration. Every day we saw new country. Every evening we bivouacked—for there were no tents—by the side of some new stream.

We lived on flocks of sheep which we drove with us, and chickens which we hunted round deserted farms. My wagon carried the best tinned provisions which London could supply.

I moved from column to column, wherever there was a chance of fighting. Riding sometimes quite alone across wide stretches of doubtful country, I would arrive at the rear guard of a British column, actually lapped about by the enemy in the enormous plains, stay with them for three or four days if the general was well disposed, and then dart back across a landscape charged with silent menace, to keep up a continuous stream of letters and telegrams to my newspaper.

All day long I scampered about the moving cavalry screens searching in the carelessness of youth for every scrap of adventure, experience or copy. Nearly every day as daylight broke and our widespread array of horse and foot began to move, the patter of rifle fire provided the

exceptional thrills of active service. Sometimes there were regular actions in which large bodies of troops were seen advancing against hills and ridges held by skilful, speedy and ubiquitous mounted Boers. Every few days a score of our men cut off, ambushed or entrapped, made us conscious of the great fighting qualities of these rifle-armed horsemen of the wilderness who hung upon the movements of the British forces with sleuth-like vigilance and tenacity.

The Boers, although ready to evacuate Johannesburg, sent a strong force to oppose the advance of our column at a point called Florida. Here on June 1, 1900, on the very ground where the Jameson raiders had surrendered years before, a sharp action was fought. Pretoria capitulated four days later. Enormous spans of oxen had dragged two 9.5-inch howitzers, the cow-guns as they were called, all these hundreds of miles to bombard the forts; but they were never needed after all.

Nevertheless my re-entry of the Boer capital was exciting. Early on the morning of June 5 Marlborough—one of the staff officers—and I rode out together and soon reached the head of an infantry column already in the outskirts of the town. There were no military precautions, and we arrived, a large group of officers, at the closed gates of the railway level crossing. Quite slowly there now steamed past our eyes a long train drawn by two engines and crammed with armed Boers whose rifles bristled from every window. We gazed at each other dumbfounded at three yards' distance. A single shot would have precipitated a horrible carnage on both sides. Although sorry that the train should escape, it was with unfeigned relief that we saw it glide away past our noses.

Then Marlborough and I cantered into the town. We knew that the officer prisoners had been removed from the State Model Schools, from which I had escaped, and we asked our way to their present place of confinement. When we found the prison camp, a long tin building surrounded by a dense wire entanglement, I raised my hat and cheered. The cry was instantly answered from within. What followed resembled the end of an Adelphi melodrama. We were only two, and before us stood the armed Boer guard of fifty-two men with their rifles at the "ready." Marlborough, resplendent in the red tabs of the staff, called on the commandant to surrender forthwith, adding by a happy thought that he would give a receipt for the rifles.



The prisoners rushed out into the yard, some in uniform, some in flannels, hatless or coatless, but all violently excited. The sentries threw down their rifles, the gates were flung open, and while the last of the guard stood uncertain what to do, the long-penned-up officers surrounded them and seized their weapons. Someone produced a Union Jack, the Transvaal emblem was torn down, and amidst wild cheers the first British flag was hoisted over Pretoria.

Time: 8.47, June 5.

Tableau!

I HAD one more adventure in South Africa. Our operations were at an end. The war had become a guerrilla and promised to be shapeless and indefinite. With the consent of the authorities I resumed my full civilian status and took the train for Cape Town.

All went well till, about a hundred miles south of Johannesburg, the train stopped with a jerk. We got out; at the same moment there arrived almost at our feet a shell from a small Boer gun. It burst with a startling bang, throwing up clods from the embankment. A hundred yards ahead of us a temporary wooden bridge was in flames. The train was enormously long and crowded with soldiers from a score of regiments. No one was in command. The soldiers began to get out of the carriages in confusion. I saw no officers.

Kopjes Station, where there was a fortified camp, surmounted by two five-inch guns, was three miles back. My memories of the armoured train made me extremely sensitive about our line of retreat. I therefore ran to the engine, climbed into the cab and ordered the engine driver to blow his whistle to make the men re-entrain, and steam back instantly to Kopjes Station. He obeyed. While I was standing on the footplate to make sure the soldiers had got back into the train, I saw, less than a hundred yards away in the dry watercourse under the burning bridge, a cluster of dark figures. These were the last Boers I was to see as enemies. The engine started, and we were soon all safely within the entrenchment at Kopjes Station.

I thought for many years that the Boer shell which had burst so near us on the embankment was the last projectile I should ever see fired in anger. This expectation proved unfounded.



WHEN the Boer military power had been broken, the first thoughts of the British Government were to let bygones be bygones. An Under-Secretary, Lord Wolverton, was allowed to make a speech in this sense. All my instincts acclaimed this magnanimity. I had sent dispatches to my paper, urging a moderate course in the treatment of enemy sympathizers in the occupied territories. This message was ill received in England. A vindictive spirit ruled. The Under-Secretary had been suppressed; and I bore the brunt of Conservative anger. Even the *Morning Post*, while printing my messages, sorrowfully disagreed with my view. The Natal newspapers were loud-voiced in condemnation. I replied that it was not the first time that victorious gladiators had been surprised to see thumbs turned down in the Imperial box.

Sir Alfred Milner, the High Commissioner in South Africa, was far more understanding. He said, "I thought they would be upset by your message. Of course, all these people have got to live together. They must forgive and forget, and make a common country. But now passions are running too high. People who have had their friends or relations killed, or whose homes have been invaded, will not hear of clemency till they calm down. I understand your feelings, but it does no good to express them now."

I was impressed by hearing these calm, detached, broad-minded opinions from the lips of one so widely portrayed as the embodiment of rigid uncompromising subjugation. In the event, for all the fierce words, the treatment accorded to rebels and traitors by the British Government was indulgent in the extreme.

Here I must confess that all through my life I have found myself in disagreement alternately with both the historic English parties. I have always urged fighting wars and other contentions with might and main till overwhelming victory, and then offering the hand of friendship to the vanquished. Thus I have always been against the pacifists during the quarrel, and against the Jingoës at its close.

Once asked to devise an inscription for a monument in France, I wrote, "In war, Resolution. In defeat, Défiance. In victory, Magnanimity. In peace, Goodwill." The inscription was not accepted.

Those who can win a war well can rarely make a good peace, and those who could make a good peace would never have won the war. It

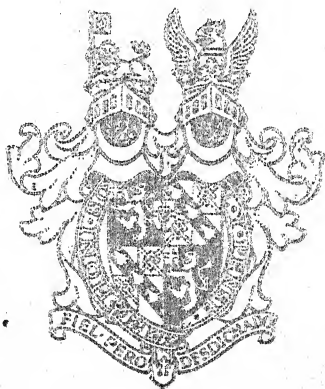
would perhaps be pressing the argument too far to suggest that I could do both.

Most people in England thought, now that Pretoria was taken, that the war was over. They gave themselves up to rejoicings. But the government knew better. They had allowed themselves to be drawn on by the tides of success into an arbitrary and dangerous position. There was to be no negotiation with the Boer republics. They were simply to be blotted out. If the Boers liked to come in and surrender either singly or under their generals, they would get very good treatment, and ultimately, after enough English had settled in the conquered territory to make it safe, they would be given self-government as in other British colonies. Otherwise they would be hunted down or caught even to the very last man. As Lord Milner put it some time later on, "in a certain sense the war would never be ended"; it would just fade away.

This was an error destined to cost us dear. There were still many thousands of wild, fierce, dauntless men under leaders like Botha, and Smuts, who now fought on in their vast country not for victory, but for honour. The flames of partisan warfare broke out again and again behind the armies in regions completely pacified. This long-drawn struggle bred shocking evils. The roving enemy wore no uniforms of their own; they mingled with the population, lodged and were succoured in farmhouses whose owners had taken the oath of neutrality, and sprang into being, now here, now there, to make some formidable and bloody attack upon an unwary column or isolated post. To cope with all this the British military authorities found it necessary to clear whole districts and gather the population into concentration camps. The policy of burning farms whose owners had broken their oath, far from quelling the fighting Boers, only rendered them desperate. The British on their side were incensed against the rebels, oath-breakers and Boers who wore captured British uniforms as a treacherous stratagem. However, very few persons were executed, and to the very end the Boer commandos did not hesitate to send their wounded into the British field hospitals. Thus humanity and civilization were never wholly banished, and both sides preserved amid frightful reciprocal injuries some mutual respect during two harsh years of waste and devastation. All this, however, lay in the future.

I RETURNED to England in a most fortunate situation. My capture and escape had been followed with intense interest by the public, and this popularity made it possible for me to enter upon the political career to which I had long aspired. I decided to stand for Parliament. A General Election had been called for the autumn of 1900, and I was designated by the Conservative Party to contest the seat in the Lancashire district of Oldham. The people of the district gave me a warm welcome. I drove through streets crowded with enthusiastic mill girls, and I described my escape to a tremendous meeting in the Theatre Royal. When I mentioned the name of Mr. Dewsnap, the Oldham engineer who had been Mr. Howard's assistant, the audience shouted: "His wife's in the gallery." There was general jubilation.

The prevailing wave of opinion was with the Conservatives, and I was elected by a modest margin to the House of Commons. I was now twenty-six. Was it wonderful that I should have thought I had arrived? But luckily life is not so easy as all that: otherwise we should get to the end too quickly. From this time I was engaged in political affairs which absorbed my thoughts and energies until September 1908, when I married and lived happily ever afterwards.





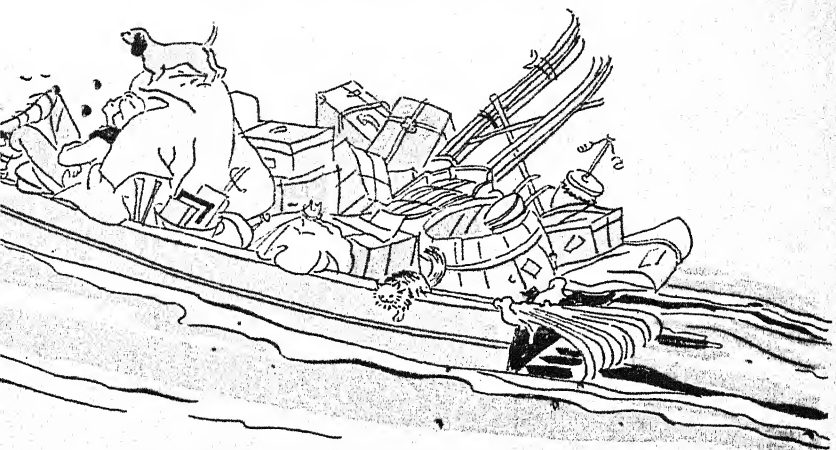
Winston S. Churchill



*Illustrations by Harry Beckhoff*

# Onions in the Stew

*A condensation of the book by*  
**BETTY MACDONALD**

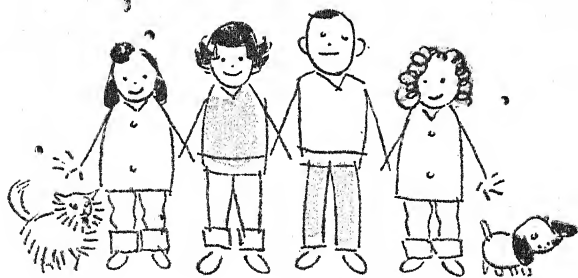


*"Onions in the Stew" is published by Hammond, Hammond, London*

*Onions in the Stew* is a true story about an island, a house and a family. The island, Vashon, lies "plump, curvy and green" in the icy waters of Puget Sound, and the house, log-built and rambling, is the one the MacDonald family found there, after long search, and made their home.

Writing with her generous gift of gaiety, Betty MacDonald initiates every reader into the rigours of island-living in winter and the delights of island-living in spring. But more than that, here is a warm-hearted story of parents and growing children, of pets and neighbours and guests and handymen, of sulks and laughter, of problems solved and pleasures shared. Even without onions, this would be a delectable stew.

"An oh-so-simple, but oh-so-funny story."—Pat Taylor in *The People*



For twelve years we MacDonalds have been living on an island in Puget Sound. There is no getting away from it, life on an island is different from life in the St. Francis Hotel but you can get used to it, can even grow to like it. Now, as November (or July) settles round the house like a wet sponge, we say placidly to each other, "I love it here. I wouldn't live anywhere else."

I cannot say that everyone should live as we do, but you might be happy on an island if you can face up to the following:

1. Dinner guests are often still with you days later, and sleeping in the lawn swing is *fun* (I keep telling Don) if you take two sleeping pills and remember that the racoons are just trying to be *friends*.
2. Any definite appointment, such as childbirth or jury duty, acts as an automatic signal for the ferry-boats to stop running.
3. A telephone call from a relative beginning "Hello, dear, we've been thinking of you . . ." means you are going to get somebody's children.
4. If you miss the last ferry—the one five a.m.—you have to sit on the dock all night.
5. Anyone contemplating island-dwelling must be physically strong and it is an added advantage if you aren't too bright.



Our island, discovered in 1792 by Captain Vancouver and named Vashon after a Navy friend, is about fifteen miles long and five miles round the hips. It is the intense green of chopped parsley, plump and curvy, reposes in the icy waters of Puget Sound between Seattle and Tacoma, and is more or less accessible to each by ferry-boat.

On the map Vashon Island looks somewhat like a peacock and somewhat like a buzzard, depending on how long you have been trapped here. The climate, about ten degrees warmer and wetter than Seattle, is ideal for primroses, strawberries, mildew and people with dry skin who like to read. The population is about five thousand *people* and a number of snivelling cowards who move to the city in winter.

To the west across the winding channel are the fierce snowy Olympic Mountains and the untamed Olympic Peninsula. Eastward are the smoky Cascade Mountains and Seattle. North are other islands, and south is Mount Rainier, that magnificent, unbelievably shy peak who parts her clouds and shows her exquisite face only after she has made sure Uncle Jim and Aunt Helen are really on their way back to Minneapolis.

Everything on Vashon Island grows with insane vigour and you have the distinct feeling, as you leave the dock and start up the main highway, that you should have brought along a matchet. Alder, syringa, maple, elderberry, madroño, willow, fir, laurel and dogwood turn the roads into green tunnels, and only assiduous chopping by the county and the telephone and power companies keeps this jungle from closing up the highways altogether.

The farm land of Vashon—famous for its peaches and berries, Croft lilies and orchids—is gently sloping and covered with green and brown patchwork fields tucked in round the edges with blanket-stitching fences. Scattered about are houses, mostly old, shapeless and paintless. Our ugliness on Vashon is rawboned, useful, natural and honest. Our beauty is accidental, often breath-taking. Oval ponds lying in green fields like forgotten hand-mirrors. White pullets flapping across a meadow like scraps of torn paper. Peach trees with whitewashed trunks and crowded bright pink branches marching through newly ploughed orchards.

Every road on Vashon leads to the water eventually. From any high point, the tides and currents show up in the channels like spilt ink. The

ferry-boats are white ducks waddling earnestly from shore to shore. We see occasional battleships, destroyers or carriers from the Bremerton Navy Yard, and freighters looking like toys. Sometimes we see black-fish leaping about in the sunshine like playful submarines. They slap their tails on the water and glistening spray goes fifty feet into the air.

At night we can see the lights of Seattle glittering on the horizon like a lapful of costume jewellery. From the south the lights of Tacoma blaze up and mingle with the stars. We like this. We can go *there* any time. It assures us that we are here by choice.

The town of Vashon is small, flourishing, friendly and tacky. The shops are modern and obliging—if they don't have it they will get it. Only occasionally do they show signs of *naïveté*. Once I asked Don to get me some wild rice, purposefully forgetting to tell him it was two dollars and twenty-five cents a package. He came home with eight boxes, and after I had stopped screaming he explained defensively, "The woman at the checking counter said that as they were two for a quarter why didn't I take a couple more, so I did. We can use it, can't we? She said 'Wild rice don't go good in Vashon. It's a slow-mover.'"

Everybody goes into town on Saturday. The pavements overflow with harassed mothers in blue jeans, red-cheeked farmers tossing sacks of feed into trucks, husbands waiting martyred in parked cars, small boys making odd buzzing noises as they dart round shoppers, grocery boys staggering under mountainous loads as they search wildly for "that red sedan with the dent in the wing," and Indians lolling against the building's eating ice-cream cones.

How is it we moved to Vashon Island in the first place? Well, it was just after Pearl Harbour and my husband, Donald, and I had recently met and married. Up to that time I had been living with my children—Anne, twelve, and Joan, eleven—my mother and two of my sisters in a brown house in Seattle where we had numerous pets, a great deal of fun and hardly any money.

I was working for a contractor who was building something or other, very vital, for the Government. Don, who was doing final test at the Boeing Aeroplane Factory, had a dank, dark hillside apartment where we managed to exist for a short time, but I very soon decided that I had better start looking for a house. The only trouble was that in Seattle

there weren't any houses to let and none for sale for nothing, which is what we had.

In the Pacific North-west, however, there are several hundred islands, varying in size from small enough to be cuddled in the crook of your arm to over a hundred miles long. Five of the larger islands are within easy travelling distance of Seattle. They are heavily wooded, ringed with beaches both sandy and rocky, and homes, both permanent and summer, some of which might be to let, we thought. But when I tackled an estate agent about them, he was incredulous. "Bainbridge? Whiteby? Vashon?" he kept repeating. "What ever give you the idea to move over there? Now we gotta little six-on-one dream for sale on Highway 99. . . ."

"We'd better look for ourselves," I told Don.

The next week-end we were invited to Vashon Island. The Havers, whom we visited, had a charming house on the beach, and Saturday night as Don and I lay in bed on their porch, listening to the slurp, splash, slurp of the waves against the sea-wall, we decided that this was the perfect spot. The next morning, as we dug clams in the hot sunshine, we told George Haver, "We like this place. We want to live here."

George was glad that we liked his beach, but he explained that, even though they had to walk in by a county trail and bring in their provisions by boat or by wife, all the people there loved their houses and never let them. We were so downcast at this that he took us for a boat ride round the point. "As you're disappointed anyway," he said, "I'll show you a place that will spoil you for any other beach house." He steered the boat to shore, pulled it up on a log, and we climbed a small winding path to the house.

He had told the truth. It was the most attractive house we had seen. Built of hewn fir timbers, it was snuggled on the lap of the hillside, and the rain and the salt air had turned it a soft pewter colour. The kitchen had knotty-pine walls with a bricked-in electric stove and an incinerator. Its windows looked at Puget Sound over a huge window-box full of pink geraniums, and its floor was of pegged pine planks. The living-room was about forty feet long, had the same plank floors, an enormous stone fire-place and a small stairway leading to a balcony,

from which opened three small bedrooms and a bath. At the south end of the balcony was the master bedroom. It had a beamed ceiling and a fire-place with a copper hood. In all the rooms were hand-braided rugs and lovely pine furniture. There were two patios made of rounds of cedar with flowering moss in between, and across the front of the house was a rustic porch overlooking the water and facing Mount Rainier.

Unfortunately, however, the Hendersons, who owned it, were very happy there. "We are going to live here for ever," they told us, smugly.

Then one morning, a good while and many crumbling houses later, I was dispiritedly leafing through the "For Sale—Waterfront" section of the paper when I saw what appeared to be an advertisement of the Henderson place on Vashon. The ad said: "Lodge-type log house, huge stone fire-place, four hundred feet of sandy beach—for sale seven thousand dollars furnished."

I called Mrs. Henderson at her office and she told me that it was their house; that her husband had been offered a wonderful job in California. I asked her why she hadn't called me and she said, "Oh, I thought of course you had found something by this time." I choked back an impulse to say, "Oh, sure, and while I was at it I worked out a plan for world peace." Instead, I made arrangements to go over the next weekend. My hands were shaking as I hung up the phone.

On Saturday, as Don and I swung along the trail to the Hendersons' house, I said excitedly, "Don, I just know we are going to get this house."

Don, who is a pure Scot, is not exactly an optimist. In fact, if I were to be absolutely truthful, and I wouldn't dare because we are so happily married, I would say that Don is a charter member of that old Scottish brotherhood sworn always to bring bad news home.

As we admired the huge virgin firs against the blue sky, and breathed deeply of the fresh salty air, I said again, "Don't you have that feeling, Don? That this house was *meant* for us?"

Don said two things: "I'd have more of that feeling if we had any money," and "There certainly is plenty of erosion along here."

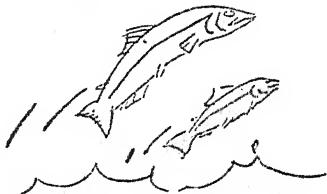
But the house *was* for sale and the Hendersons were really eager to sell it to us. We were to pay a hundred and fifty dollars a month until we had established a down payment, then we would get the bank to

give us a mortgage. We were all terribly casual and gay, made more so by the fact that none of us had any money, and didn't want the others to know it. I kept my hand over Don's truthful mouth practically all day Sunday.

We agreed to come out the next week-end with two payments (which we intended to borrow) and the house would be ours.

"You see," I said to Don as we stood on the ferry later. "It *was* meant to be."

Don pointed at the cars bouncing on to the deck, each one denting its exhaust-pipe, and remarked gloomily, "That ramp isn't down far enough."



I SUPPOSE all of us have said at some time or another, "I will never allow *things* to dominate my life." If, like me, you think that you have kept your possessions down to grandmother's best tea-set and a few first editions, you should move to an island. Our own version of grandmother's tea-set turned out to be three old trunks minus handles, eight barrels of dishes, boxes of tinned goods and medicines, records, elk antlers, books, photographs, pillows, pots and pans, skirt-hangers, lamp-shades, ironing-boards and dog's beds.

This was in October. The first step was to move out of our apartment into Mother's house, which was easy. We simply kept dumping things in the car and driving them to Mother's until the apartment was empty. I started packing very methodically. "Books—reference" I marked on a carton. "Sheets—towels" I marked on another. When Don tried to help I said kindly but firmly, "You had better let me do it, dear. I know exactly what I am doing and I want things to be orderly."

Then somehow I began running out of enough of the same thing to fill a box—also out of boxes—also out of strength. By the end of the day I was rolling a jar of mayonnaise, a heel of salami and a half-filled

bottle of perfume in my tweed skirt and not even stamping the bundle "Perishable."

Next came getting the things to Vashon, which was easy too. Don borrowed a moving-van and a driver, we all loaded it and the car and we were off. One last sentimental look at the old brown house revealed that we had left Mother's portrait, the skis, and Tudor the dog, who didn't like cars and kept oozing in one side and out of the other. Getting these things in took just the right amount of time for us to miss the ferry and wait an hour on the dock. Also, just as we got under way, Tudor reared up, put his paws on Don's shoulders and was sick down the back of his cashmere sweater. Don groaned. He couldn't do much else because crowded in the front seat with us were the two girls, the portrait, the elk antlers, and a lot of strained silence. When we got to the dock at last, I carefully manœuvred the sweater over Don's head and substituted a red sweat shirt still warm from Mrs. Miniver, the cat. Don's expression was one of despairing rage spread thinly over a boiling desire to commit wificide and dogicide.

Things weren't really going too badly, however. The day was lovely—hazy with a marigold sun. The tide was going out and the wet sand by the dock gave off a nice seaweedy smell. Don took the opportunity to explain about the tides but I only half-listened as I like my own conception of the tide situation, which is that every twelve hours somebody, perhaps the man in the moon, pulls the plug and lets out some of the ocean. After a while he turns on the tap and fills it up again.

The wash from an aircraft carrier suddenly began to slap the flat beach with a noise like giant hand-clapping. The old dock trembled and Tudor barked. Anne and Joan laughed and shouted and the day took on a holiday aspect as the ferry came in.

Our pewter-coloured dream house had no road. This tiny flaw in its perfection had during the summer somehow emerged as a blessing: no road meant no bores, the Hendersons said. No road meant safety for the children and animals. Then came the day of reckoning and we were faced with the uncomfortable fact that strolling a mile and a half from the ferry on a beautiful footpath along the water is one thing. Hauling in a van-load of possessions is unquestionably another.

Thank heaven the Sanders, our civilization-ridden neighbours to the

south, did have a road, though it ended two hundred feet from the beach. They let us use it; they also lent us three row-boats and an out-board motor. Don tied the boats together, we all loaded them, and by nightfall we had most of the stuff on our sea-wall, a few things in the house and a washing-machine Mother had given me in one of the boats.

Then we all staggered up the path to our beautiful new house, which was as cold as a crypt and piled high with junk. While Don and Joanie built roaring carton fires in the incinerator and the fire-places, Anne and I pawed through boxes looking for the food. The night before I had baked a ham and a pot of beans, "so that everything will be ready and cosy," I told Don. But where were they? Not in this old box of pictures—or this one of vases, or this. . . . After almost an hour of fruitless search we decided that they were still on the sea-wall. I took Tudor and a torch and went down.

Even though I ached all over, I still had a wonderful feeling of security as I realized that this was *our* path and I was going down to look for *our* ham on *our* sea-wall.

I flashed the light over the higgledy-piggledy heaps of boxes, hoping that in some mysterious way the ham would make itself known. It didn't, so I called Tudor.

"Here, boy," I said kindly. "Here, Tudor, boy."

Tudor, who was busy sniffing a rock, ignored me. "Tudor," I said rather sharply. Instantly he flattened himself on the ground and buried his head in his paws.

I sweetened my voice again. "Tudor, food! Find it, boy!" I patted the boxes enthusiastically. Tudor gave me a long disdainful look, then ran up the path to the house.

But he had given me an idea. I began to sniff the boxes myself, and I finally found the ham. It was under "Books—reference" and on top of "Living-room curtains."

After dinner while Anne and Joan washed the dishes in *our* new sink, which fact did little to lift their low opinion of this drudgery, Don and I made up the beds. I thanked God for my short-lived spurt of efficiency; the boxes were clearly marked: "Blankets—raspberry jam—bathing suits—bed linen."

A fire-place in a bedroom is a very luxurious item. Even poking tired



feet into the icy reaches of clean sheets is not so painful when you are looking into a crackling fire. After we had turned out the lights, Don and I watched the leaping shadows on the ceiling and listened to the wind making plaintive noises in the eaves. The bed was very comfortable. I sighed contentedly, and closed my eyes. Then suddenly I was aware that, in addition to the crackle of our fire and the slosh of our waves, I was listening to rain on our roof.

Fumbling for the light I said wearily to Don, "Do you hear that? It's raining."

Don said, "S'what?"

I said, "Rain. And the books and records are still out on the sea-wall."

Sighing heavily, Don sat up. Hearing us the girls called out in the owlish way of children, "Who? What? Where? Who? Who?"

I explained over my shoulder as I ran down the stairs. Snatching up a couple of tarpaulins, we started down the path. The rain was brisk and wet. After we had covered the boxes Don flashed his light on the washing-machine defiantly spraddled in the row-boat. The waves were almost washing over the stern. "Come on," he said without enthusiasm, "we'll have to pull the boat up the steps." We both jerked and managed finally to get the prow on to the top step, the stern in the water, the washing-machine veering dangerously aft. I threaded my dressing-gown cord through a rowlock and round the wringer, knowing very well it was like trying to restrain a wounded buffalo with a piece of thread. Grimly, tying the painter to a slender maple tree, Don said, "'An' lea'e us nough but grief and pain, for promis'd joy.'"

By the time we got back to bed, the fire had burnt down, but it was still a delight. From far across the water a freighter tooted. The rain on the roof sounded like millions of birds' feet. I said to Don, "Well, here we are, all together at last in our own house."

Don said, "Unk." He was very tired. With a snap the last piece of burning wood broke apart. The noise of the Sound was like a drum roll now. "A heavenly sound," I thought sleepily.

Then above the wind, the rain and the surf I thought I detected a heavy groaning, scraping noise.

"The washing-machine," Don said suddenly, loudly, in my ear. "Still trying to get away."



ANY CHANGE as drastic as moving from the city to an island should be accomplished gradually, like slimming. But suddenly we were up to our chins in a new life and, because of our jobs, had *one day to adjust*. We had moved on Saturday. And on Sunday morning I got up later, tired and nastier than I had planned, to find that the washing-machine had got away after all. Joan and Don with their irritating early-morning cheerfulness and twenty-twenty vision had spotted it riding the waves like a stout grey lady on an excursion boat.

Don said cheerfully, "The water's awfully rough out there. I can see huge whitecaps. Let's row out now, before breakfast."

"I'm not going anywhere until I have a cup of coffee," I said crossly.

"I'm not either," Anne said. "Only I'm going to have cocoa."

"Ah, come on, Mommy," Joan said.

"Why don't you and Joan go," I said to Don, "and Anne and I will get breakfast."

"We'll all have to go," Don said. "Towing that washing-machine in that rough water is going to be very ticklish business."

So we had breakfast first and after my second cup of coffee I became mildly enthusiastic. "Hurry with your cocoa," I said brightly to Anne. "We're going for our very first boat ride."

"Does Don know how to row?" Anne said suspiciously.

"Of course," I said. "Don't you, Don?"

"Well," Don said, "I can manage, I guess."

I looked out at the Sound again. The water in the middle looked much rougher. I poured myself another cup of coffee.

"Oh, Mommy," Joan said, "we'll *never* get started."

"This may be the last cup of coffee I'll ever have," I said, "and I intend to enjoy it."

"You may as well pour me one too," Don said, sighing resignedly.

"Why don't you get one of the neighbours to help you?" I said, peering past the pink geraniums in the window-box towards the horizon. "If that speck I see out there is the row-boat with the washing-machine in it, it's half-way to Alaska."

"Oh, nonsense," Don said. "People row across the Sound all the time. It won't take us long."

When we had launched the big row-boat there was a great deal of unnecessary talk about my tremendous weight and how, if I sat on one side with only one of the girls' meagre flyweight to balance me, the boat would tip over. This could have been easily solved by my sitting in the prow, but that was a favourite spot and both girls wanted it. They finally agreed to take turns, so that when we were in the middle of the Sound in rough water they vigorously crowded past Don and the oars, rocking the boat dangerously and kicking me in the ankles while they changed seats.

Don was not very adept at the oars. He blamed it on "these damned old oars which keep slipping out of the rowlocks," but Joan informed him tactlessly that he didn't hold the blades straight, he should dip deeper, he was rowing too hard with his right oar and he was getting everybody wet. She had learned *everything* about rowing at Auntie Dede's and she would be glad to help him.

I, who had been rowing since I was five years old and really did know everything about rowing, kept my mouth shut because I was not anxious to take the oars. With set lips, Don continued to dip and pull and splash towards the washing-machine.

It had slid up and wedged itself in the prow of the row-boat, from which position it stolidly watched our manœuvres to ease alongside and get the painter. This was not too easy as the water was very choppy and the painter was tangled round the washing-machine's legs. In his attempt to lift the washing-machine and untangle the rope, Don leaned so hard on the side of our boat we shipped water.

Anne immediately began to shriek, "We're tipping over! We're sinking! Help! Help!"

Joan stood up and shouted, "Watch out, everybody, I'm going to get in the other boat!"

I yelled, "Don't get in the other boat, Joan! Shut up, Anne! Don, be careful!" and Don said, "EVERYBODY BE QUIET!" just as the black clouds above us released large wet raindrops, which began splashing on our heads.

Joan said, "Please, Mommy, let me get in the other boat. I can hand you the rope."

Don said, "Okay, Joanie, but wait until I steady the boat."

I said, "Don, *don't* let her! The washing-machine will come loose and squash her and what if we can't get the rope and she drifts away?"

"Don't be silly," Don said. "Okay, Joanie, here you go." Nimble Joan jumped into the stern of the other boat, which was riding high in the water owing to the weight of the washing-machine, skipped down to the prow, crawled *under* the washing-machine and fed the painter out through the small opening between the wringer and the point of the prow. I grabbed the rope and yelled at her to "get out from under that washing-machine at once!" She did, announcing unconcernedly as she jumped back into our boat, "It was caught on that tap on the side and here's your dressing-gown cord."

We reached shore at last, the washing-machine defiant and unco-operative all the way, and when we tried to manœuvre it up the narrow trail to the house it weighed just as much as possible and kept flinging its wringer round its head like a billy club.

When we finally had it comfortably installed in the laundry we all had some more coffee and cocoa and then began the unpacking. While I worked I handed down rapid fair decisions on vital questions such as: "Isn't this my blouse, Mommy, you can tell by the ink-stain on the collar, see?" and "Betty, are you going to let the girls wear all my sweaters? They have already taken all my sweat shirts." The last was wailed plaintively from the bedroom where Don was rapidly filling up all the drawers with *his* things. I still keep my underwear, gloves, jewellery, diary and scarfs in the drawers in my bedside table. Those pictures in film magazines of the star's bedroom with a separate cupboard for handbags and another for fur coats make me drool with envy. Not that I would have anything to put in them but it would be so wonderful, when wishing to change handbags, not to have to stand on the hamper and fish about for one in the top bathroom cupboard where I also keep stacks of clean flour sacks (remains of chicken-farming days) and the suit-cases.

The next problem was getting our food to fit into the medium-sized ice-box. All refrigerators seem to be designed for people who buy half a turkey, and as I am the type of shopper who makes the butcher call out, "Here comes Betty, Al—better get out that big new side of beef," I



ended up, as I always shall, with the ice-box so stuffed that when I opened the door the tomatoes, delicately balanced on top of the milk bottles, bounced into the wood-box. The ham was as big as Tudor.

"Oh, well," I said to myself as I rammed the door shut against it, "we can have ham and eggs for breakfast, cold ham and potato salad for supper, ham sandwiches, ham omelets—we won't have to buy anything for weeks and weeks!"

Then we sat down to supper and Don said with disbelief, "Ham? Again?"

Anne said, "Marilyn's family always goes to a restaurant on Sunday."

Joan said, "Johnny's mother cooks fried chicken every Sunday. She bakes her own bread too."

Anne said, "Marilyn's mother certainly is a lot of fun, huh, Joanie?"

"More ham, anyone?" I said, my voice trembling with emotion. "Please have some more ham!"

THEN CAME getting the girls ready for school. Joan merely asked me forty-two times if I had put *three* whole sandwiches in her lunch. I said I had and she said what about an apple—I said yes and she said cakes? Yes. She was ready.

Anne's preparation involved first going through and despising all her clothes, then choosing the least loathsome things and ironing them, even things already as smooth as mirrors. This to the accompaniment of: "How I loathe hand-me-downs!" "How I wish we were rich." "How I hate living in the country." I finally let her alone, and went out to put breakfast on the table.

She called to me excitedly. When I went back into the living-room she was leaning over the ironing-board, her face sparkling with delight. "Look, Mommy, isn't he adorable?" she said, pointing to a large buck standing on the porch, peering in the window. "A real live deer on *our* porch. Oh, I love living in the country! It's so romantic!"

So we enrolled the children at school. Joan in the seventh grade of the Vashon Grade School, a comfortable brown-shingled building about three miles from us, and Anne as a freshman in the high school, a large

modern edifice seven miles away. To get the school bus the girls had two choices. If the tide was low they could use the Sanders's road. If the tide was high they had to walk along the footpath and get on the bus at the dock. Joan liked her school and got along very well, only occasionally being kept late for some misdemeanour—very unfairly, I thought, as it meant she had to walk the three miles home, usually in the rain. The first time this happened I threatened heatedly to go up to school and *do something*. Anne and Joan were delighted, but Don told me not to be hasty and produced from his past several valiant incidents having to do with his ploughing through blizzards on cardboard soles, he was so eager to get an education. So as long as she indulged in climbing out of windows and throwing chalk, Joan was kept after school and had to walk home. Now that I think about it, it was a very healthy punishment.

Anne immediately loathed her school because: *a*. It was a school. *b*. "They sing hymns at noon instead of dancing." Often when I came home from work, I would learn that she had stayed at home with some mysterious ailment, such as non-focusing eyes or pains in her heels. On such evenings I would be greeted with a sparkling, clean house, stuffed pork chops and hot apple-pie for dinner, all the ironing done, the beds made. The temptation to keep this little home-bird home was almost overpowering. But my conscience told me



that I must make her continue with book learning, even if, when she *did* go to school, she did either no work or work they couldn't understand. How well I remember being summoned by her teacher and presented, via trembling hand, with one of Anne's compositions entitled, "I Don't Believe in God and Neither Does My Uncle Frank."

As soon as we had the children at school Don and I went back to work. Don had to catch (and that is the right word) the five-fifteen ferry in order to be at the Boeing plant at six-thirty.

Our schedule then was: up at four thirty—Don make fire in the incinerator—turn on oven to defrost the kitchen—Betty make coffee and Don's lunch. After he had dressed, Don unhurriedly drank his coffee, ate his poached eggs and leisurely lit a cigarette. After the third drag, he would suddenly stare unbelievably at the clock, leap up, grab his raincoat, hurl himself out into the rain and blackness. I followed him out to the porch and tried to check the tide by sound. If it was out we were glad because he could go by the beach. If it was in he had to take a tiny slippery footpath through the woods to the Sanders's road. The clock said one minute to five.

At five thirty I'd get out the bread, peanut butter and cocoa for the girls' breakfast, and then I'd go down a dank passageway to the cold little laundry where the shower was. This location of the shower, so handy for swimmers, had seemed adorable to me in the summer. In the winter it seemed like something overlooked by the Marquis de Sade. After I checked for slugs, spiders and centipedes, I would turn on the hot water full force and let it heat up the room while I ran up and made our bed. About this time I was not spilling over with wild enthusiasm for life on an island. Fortunately, five minutes under the hot shower restored my spirits to normal.

At six thirty I awakened the girls, decided with Anne, who was and is a wonderful cook, what we would have for dinner, reminded Joanie, who wasn't but is now a wonderful cook, to be sure and bring up wood when she got home from school and checked them both for lunch money and my perfume.

Then I kissed them, grabbed my torch and left. It was always seven o'clock and my ferry left at seven twenty and I would have to run the



last part. I wore casuals and carried my office shoes with my lunch, purse and grocery list in a large felt bag.

The footpath connecting our beach with the rest of the world begins at the dock, meanders along the steep south-east face of the island about fifty feet above the shore, and ends at our house. Now, and then, particularly after an earthquake or storm, walking it is an adventure. Sometimes you round a curve to find the trail has slid off the face of the hill and is crouched at the bottom of a ravine twenty or thirty feet below. Or you suddenly come on collapsed bridges or big trees across the path. Once an enormous alder fell between me and a neighbour about ten feet ahead of me. We might both have been killed.

From the dock, the first stretch of the footpath is generally quite respectable, but as it approaches our house it becomes little more than a cowpath, narrow, garlanded with wild blackberry, syringa, and elderberry. In the autumn this part of the footpath is lacy with spider-webs stretched trustingly every night from syringa to elderberry about face high. I used to try to catch them by swinging my bag ahead of me, but if it was dark I often missed and ran the rest of the way to the ferry clawing wildly at an invisible veil complete, I was afraid, with a dot that was alive.

When I reached the "big tree," a huge old-growth fir, I could see whether the ferry was in, nearly in or going out again. It was here that I usually had to start running.

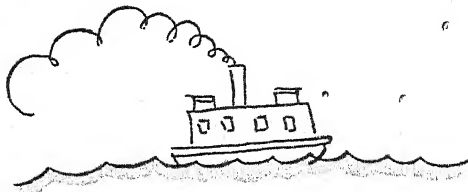
But my first morning I had plenty of time. I made my way down to the dock in a leisurely fashion and leaned on the splintery old railing. A sea-gull swooped down and landed beside me. He had part of one toe missing, his vest was dirty and he had a face like a Hollywood producer, but I was grateful for his friendliness. Together we examined the morning. The mountains were purple cut-outs pasted on a pale green sky. The water, a rippleless sheet of foil, reflected a single late-blooming star. The fat little ferry, head high above the water, swam steadily towards the dock.

It was nearly seven fifteen and rosy-faced people began hurrying past me along the wooden promenade. All the women carried bags containing town shoes. I wondered if I should change my shoes then or do it in the ladies' lounge on the ferry. I glanced down at my feet



and there, lying between my two brown casuals, was a five-dollar bill.

That night as I stuffed it in the teapot, traditional place for Mother to stuff money, I told Don and the children, "It is an omen of good luck." It was too.



IN THE CITY, weather was a topic passed round with the salted peanuts and not expected to hang about much past the introductions. In the country, weather is as important as food and sometimes means the difference between life and death.

In the twelve years since we moved to Vashon Island we have experienced the most rain, the driest summer (that wonderful one), the coldest winter, the worst earthquake, the highest tide, the lowest tide, the hottest day, the earliest spring, the latest spring, the dreariest winter (this one), in addition to a total eclipse of the moon, a total eclipse of the sun and a flying saucer on the Oregon coast.

We have also come to expect, in times of great emergency, no cooperation from the elements.

There was that time, after weeks of agonized waiting (we didn't dare use the telephone for fear "he" might want to call), when Anne was finally asked to the Junior Dance by the right boy. She had a beautiful pale blue party dress (borrowed) and Roger, *the* boy, who worked after school for Beall's Greenhouses—here on Vashon and the third largest orchid growers in the United States—had promised her an orchid, her first. He assured her it would "still be good." Everything was wonderful and the family settled back to normality, at least our version of it. There were a few tense moments the night of the dance when Anne couldn't decide whether to hide Don and me and pretend she and Joan lived on the beach alone or whether, in dinner-jacket and cocktail-dress, we were to be just lounging about in the background. When she went to

dress her last admonition was, "Now, when I come downstairs, *don't* tell me I look 'nice.' "

"We won't have to because you won't," Joan said.

Anne did look beautiful. The pale blue was perfect for her red hair and turquoise-blue eyes, but we all kept a stony silence, as she stamped down the stairs, walked over and jerked the orchid away from Roger, who, for such a "big wheel" at high school, seemed unusually frail

and apprehensive. After they had gone Joan got out her homework (mere gesture) and I got out the ironing-board. Then they were back, both looking miserable.

"The tide!" Anne wailed. "It's high! Roger got his shoes all wet just *getting* here. Can't you do *something*?"

"Why don't you walk along the footpath?" Joan asked.

"You mind your own business," Anne screamed, because for some strange adolescent reason walking along the footpath was a shameful thing to her, like picking up coal from the railway tracks.

Finally we quieted her and she wore her casuals and carried her shoes and Roger borrowed a pair of Don's

shoes and carried his own and they waded off through the tide.

When he saw my worried face at moments like this, Don would say, "Betty, you're a sentimentalist. Have you ever heard of anybody who amounted to anything without a few hardships in his life?"

This brings up a point. All books on "Child—the Training of" agree that parents should always be in accord on matters of discipline. This is a lovely thought but from my experience it could only be possible if the mother and father were identical twins. Don and I loved the children. We loved each other. But as far as our backgrounds went we were as



far apart as an Eskimo and a Maori. Don comes from a stern Scotch (both mother and father MacDonalds), Free Methodist ("free" certainly misnomer) family of twelve children. The stories of his childhood have to do with oatmeal, hauling ashes to earn school clothes, church five days a week and hour-long prayers every single night.

Up to the time of my father's death when I was twelve, my sisters, my brother and I had experienced discipline of a sort. After Daddy died we did as we pleased. Exactly. Mother's only laws of behaviour, apart from nice manners, were that we couldn't sulk and we had to tell the truth, no matter how appalling. Also, even when Daddy was alive we were encouraged to bring our friends home with us, as many as we liked for as long as we liked.

Don wanted to be "notified" about guests. He never got used to the nocturnal shrieks and giggles and trips to the ice-box occasioned by Millie's or Ruthie's or Jeanie's visit. He just was not used to adolescents, but is anybody?

Thanksgiving that year was fun for both Don and myself. Most of my family came out. We had two turkeys and the day was beautiful and everybody loved our house and thought we were so lucky to live on an island that my sister Alison and her husband bought a big old house within easy distance of us if you happened to be a goat, and my brother, Cleve, bought a small old house within easy distance if you happened to be a goat with a car.

Christmas was next. Oh, I was *glad* we lived in the country. We were going to have a real Christmas, pure in spirit, old-fashioned in execution.

"We will make *all* our presents and we will have the *biggest* Christmas-tree we have ever had and we will cut it on *our own* property." As I spoke I could hear the ringing of the axe in the crisp winter air, and see the children standing by, faces wreathed with old-fashioned smiles, while I perhaps hummed a carol or two.

Don said, "Are you dead set on getting our Christmas-tree on our own property?"

"I certainly am," I said.

"Well, then you'd better get busy on some ideas for decorating a leafless alder."

"What about those great big firs right up there?" I said, pointing up behind the house.

"Four feet in diameter is big even for your taste, isn't it?" Don said.

"I mean seedlings," I said. "I'll bet you five dollars I can find a pretty Christmas-tree next week-end."

The next week-end it rained. Also the next. But as Christmas was the following Friday we went out anyway. We walked for miles and miles and had no luck at all.

"Now are you satisfied?" Don asked, as we stumbled along in the dark and rain towards home.

Anne said, "Marilyn's mother always has a blue Christmas-tree with pink balls. Last Christmas she got a mink coat and Marilyn got a blue peignoir."

"Painwar! What's that?" Joan asked.

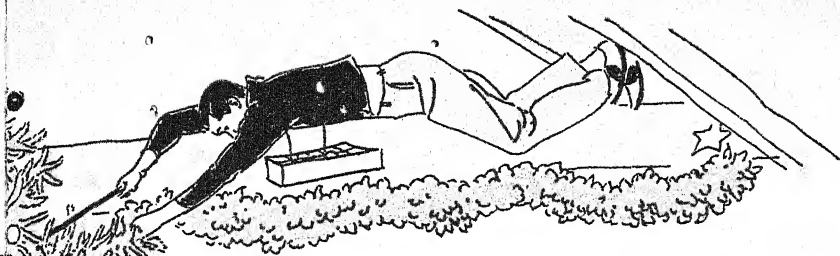
"Something much too old for Marilyn," I said crossly.

Monday morning, Mr. Harvey, a friend who lived round the point, told me on the ferry that he had some enormous balsam firs on his place, and would be delighted to let us have one. When Don and I went down that night after work, the tree was ready for us. It was perfectly beautiful, and thirty-one feet tall (the distance I had said it was to the peak of the living-room roof—I was only about ten feet off). We floated it home.

A ferry acquaintance of Don's, who had been a high-rigger in the logging camps, helped us put it up. The family Christmas-tree ornaments were not quite sufficient, especially after Don had decorated the upper branches by balancing on one of the beams, snagging a branch with the poker, attaching an ornament and letting the branch snap back and smash the ornament against the wall. We strung popcorn, made tin-foil stars, gilded walnuts, added three more strings of lights and two dozen of the largest boiled sugar canes and the tree was lovely.

Christmas Eve we went to my sister Mary's in Seattle, as we always do. It was raining hard, but we were very gay with our car-load of presents (mostly bought at the Vashon drug-store). The entire family was there—at that time only eighteen, now thirty-two and rapidly increasing. We had a wonderful time, but as we sang "Silent Night" for





the last time Don announced suddenly that we had only twenty-seven minutes to get the last ferry.

By taking back streets and going through Chinatown, we made it and the next thing we knew was that we were on the Sanders's sea-wall looking down at the tide which was slapping at the *top* step. The footpath was impenetrably dark, wet and very slippery. By the time we got home it was two thirty and our Christmas presents and our spirits were like yesterday's dumplings. But Don cheerfully built the fires while I put Christmas carols on the record-player and made oyster stew.

Christmas morning, rain was still lashing the windows, but we managed a semblance of gaiety, as we opened our partially dried-out presents in front of a roaring fire. The sagging atmosphere was leavened still further by the girls' getting just what they wanted (I believe it was men's sweaters, deep purple lipstick and a reasonable facsimile of a peignoir that year), and by Mother and



my sister Alison and her husband, who had been invited to dinner, loyally appearing.

Then came January and the big snow. We are not used to snow in this country, are never prepared for it and, even when it is actually fluttering down and the weatherman predicts twelve inches, we keep talking gamely about those winters when the nasturtiums bloomed straight through.

I remember how surprised I was that morning when I left the office to get some coffee and found that it was snowing hard. By noon the snow was three or four inches deep on the city pavements and everyone began excitedly talking about six, even eight inches, stuck cars and no bus service. I tried to call the Russells, the only other year-rounders on the beach, to ask them to look out for Anne and Joan, but the lines to Vashon were out of order. Every once in a while I went to the window and looked out. In spite of the wind a thick white curtain of soap flakes had turned the early afternoon into dusk. About three o'clock the "big boss" announced reluctantly that he was closing the office. I tried to call Vashon again but the lines were still out of order. I put on my raincoat (white poplin and stylish but no warmer than cellophane) and started for the Vashon bus stop five blocks away. The wind, apparently fresh off a glacier, came whining down between the buildings with armloads of snow and everybody was walking huddled with their heads down, their coats pulled round them like dressing-gowns.

When I got to the bus stop, I found most of the usual people already there. While we crowded in a small doorway waiting for the bus, I heard that the lights always went off in Vashon during a snow—the ferries probably wouldn't run—big snows always caused terrible slides—they hoped the local grocers had plenty of food on hand.

I became almost frantic with worry. What if I couldn't get to the island? Poor little Anne and Joan would be there all alone. I tried to inventory our supplies. All I could accurately remember was the new case of dog food, part of a case of cat food, and three cartons of cigarettes. I wondered where Don was. I thought of our huge virgin firs loaded with snow, leaning, leaning and finally crashing down on the house where two tiny matchstick figures shivered by a fire made out of the last chair.



Then the bus came, but though we finally got to the dock the ferry didn't leave till eight o'clock. The waves were enormous, the ferry creaked and groaned and writhed in pain. We landed at Vashon about nine thirty. The tide was out and Bob Russell and I started off along the beach, which seemed made of frosty billiard balls. Our torches were futile against the driving snow. It took us almost an hour to reach Bob's house. He wanted me to come in but I insisted on stumping on. My legs were numb. My face felt as if it had been sand-papered. I recognized our sea-wall, but the path to the house was completely obliterated.

On my hands and knees I crawled where I thought the path should be. I reached the kitchen door just as Don and the children came down the steps. They helped me to my feet, dragged me into the kitchen and gave me a big drink of whisky by candlelight.

"The lights are off, the telephone won't work and the pipes are all frozen," Don told me cheerfully.

"The school's closed," Anne carolled. "It'll probably be closed all winter."

"Isn't this snow keen?" Joan said.

We were snowed in for two weeks. At first I was happy because I could be with my family, the girls loved the snow and Don was very cheerful about hauling water from the spring and getting wood from the beach.

Then came the *second* day and cooking on the incinerator by candle-light lost a little of its hilarity; Don didn't leap to his feet eagerly when I called WOOD—his attitude towards the wood-pile was becoming that of a mother puma guarding her young; and the girls began quarrelling the minute they opened their eyes.

By the sixth day I began to wonder what all those delightful things were that I had been planning to do when I stopped working. I had faint recollections of dreams of long country evenings spent in front of a roaring fire reading Shakespeare, each of us taking a part, listening to symphonies on the record-player, braiding rugs.

Of course, the first drawback was the matter of light. We had one paraffin lamp and one paraffin lantern but we had no paraffin, and though we had quite a few candles we soon learned that a wick is a



wick. We couldn't play the record-player, because it was electric; I hadn't learned how to braid rugs; and the Shakespeare was in one of the hundreds of boxes in the back hall and the last thing I wanted to do was to look for it.

We played bridge—but I was the only one who knew how and my pupils refused to take my word for anything. Finally our life boiled down to reading, eating, sleeping, getting wood and getting on each other's nerves. Even eating lacked its customary fillip, due to the fact that our only really ample supplies were dog food, cat food and noodles, of which we seemed to have about a thousand pounds.

One bleak morning towards the end of the siege, I was shuffling round the kitchen contemplating a casserole of noodles, cat food and candle stubs, when Don offered to push up to Vashon and get some supplies. Of course at this point the girls rushed in with demands for absolutely vital things such as film magazines, Firecracker Red nail polish and hair-clips. After much discussion and a few tears, Don said firmly he *would* get paraffin. He *would* get hair-clips. He would *not* get film magazines or nail polish. He *would* get the mail.

We bundled him up and waved him off and, as he crunched down the beach past the spring which was a frozen waterfall and the big logs in their white fur scarfs, I could almost hear the howl of the wolves and smell the cow dung burning in our sod hut.

While Don was gone there was a fine bark tide, and Anne and Joan and I filled gunny sacks with bark and hauled them to the house. When a fire was burning hot and bright, the way only bark soaked in salt water can burn, I made a pot of coffee and we each had a cup.

While we drank our coffee, Joan told (with noticeable envy) of a school friend named Evelyn who got her clothes off the city dump and had earth floors in her house which *never* had to be swept, and Anne described her next evening-dress which she thought should be of black velvet, strapless and very tight. Joan said that Evelyn's father used to have a very good job but he didn't agree with the policy of any company so he couldn't work any more. Anne said that two of the girls in her class at school smoked. Joan said that Evelyn's Indian girl friend, who came every summer to pick fruit, had a baby in the Swansons' chicken-house, a darling little boy. Wasn't she lucky? Anne said that she thought

that thirteen was really old enough to smoke if you used a holder. I asked her if she would like a cigarette and she accepted eagerly, as did Joan. They coughed and choked their way through two apiece. When the last tear had been wiped away and the last stub crushed out, Mamsie MacDonald said to her little daughters, "Now, girls, if you feel that you must smoke, please smoke in front of me."

"Why?" Joan asked. "Do you like to watch us?"

"No," I said hurriedly. "But if you *must* try it, I want you to do it in front of us. I don't want you to feel you have to sneak."

Whereupon both girls looked so sneaky I was embarrassed for them and left the room.

Don came back at dusk with the paraffin, several tins of beef stew, very heavy and tasting like dog food, sweets, gum, film magazines, nail polish, mail, steaks, bacon, eggs, tinned milk, matches, lettuce, coffee and noodles.

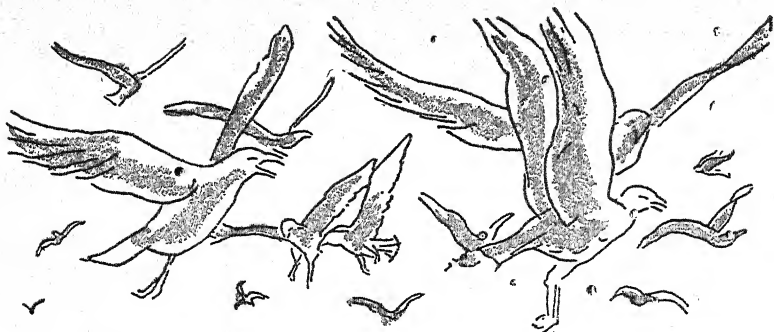
He brought the noodles, he said, because, although I hadn't said anything, he noticed the supply was getting low.

THERE WERE times during that first long, dreary, wet, dark winter when I wondered what I had ever seen in this nasty little island. When I longed to pitch a tent in, say, the lobby of a cinema—a stifling hot cinema.

The fire-place in our living-room will hold eight large logs or three sacks of bark or ten big cartons squashed. I had noticed that the Hendersons had tiny fires in this great friendly fire-place. I thought this niggardly of them and I called any little fire an "Emmy fire" after Mrs. Henderson. That was before we realized that *wood* was going to dominate our entire existence.

At first, getting wood seemed fun. A gay family enterprise. And it was free. All we had to do was to go down to the beach and pick it up, or go up to the woods and roll it down. We kept great big MacDonald fires roaring in both fire-places and the house became warmed all the way through.

Then the days began getting shorter, and the bark tides got fewer and the weather wetter and colder. Don and Joan, our wood getters, began to speak of Emmy Henderson as a pretty clever little lady. Three



toothpicks, a broom-straw and a rolled-up magazine became their idea of a dinner fire. Anne and I took to heating the plates until they turned brown and the food sizzled on them. We all wore three or four sweaters all the time. We never had colds, but we didn't have much fun either. It was like living in a mine. Dark and damp and cold when we got up. Dark and damp and cold when we went to bed.

Then one morning it was spring. The willows blew in the sunshine like freshly washed golden hair. The white hyacinths bloomed. We had our first steamed clams and fell in love with Vashon all over again.

Digging clams on your own beach is a special thing like an unexpected dividend. I remember that first Saturday morning in April, sea-gulls playing tag against a delphinium-blue sky and the Sound glittering in the sun. The tide was far out, past the eel grass, and the sand steamed in the sunlight and was warm on our feet.

"Wait until they squirt," Don cautioned Anne and me, but we couldn't. We dug huge holes in the wrong places and found only cockles, but Don and Joan wisely waited for squirts and got big sweet butter clams. After a while we walked down past the old dock where the beach is rocky and the littlenecks flourish. To get at them we had first to move tons of surface rocks, then claw about with a potato hook. We kept exposing nests of little purple shore crabs who panicked in the sunlight and ran round in circles like people during an earthquake. After Joan had picked up one and chased Anne with it and Anne had obligingly shrieked, we scratched in the buried rocks until we uncovered the clusters of littlenecks.

One of the troubles with clam digging is that you can't stop. There is always one more place you must try. When we had our bucket full Joanie said, "Let's try just one more dig over by that big rock." So we filled our pockets. Then Anne wanted to try down close to the water "just once," and pretty soon we had not only the bucket but a small wooden box full and were so tired we had to rest on a log before starting home.

Besides littlenecks, our beach offers us on occasion geoducks, sea-cucumbers, squids, crabs, piddocks, cockles and mussels. Geoducks, or gweducks, are enormous clams which sometimes burrow four feet deep. They are found only at the lowest tide, and digging them requires quick action and great tenacity. There is a game limit on them but I'm no more worried about exceeding it than I am about getting too many dinosaurs.

One June morning during the lowest tides of the year, all four of us were shuffling along the water's edge looking for mossy chitons—funny little things about the size of field mice, that cling to rocks, in wonderful colours of turquoise-blue, pale yellow, chestnut-brown and white—and giant chitons, which are bright red, look like apples and used to be eaten by the Indians.

Suddenly Joanie, who was in the lead, yelled, "Geoduck! Hurry!"

We ran, but on tiptoe so as not to warn the geoduck, who had his huge neck sticking out of the sand like a periscope. Joanie knelt down



and got a good grip on the geoduck's neck, Don and I started digging with our hands and Anne ran home for the shovel. Our finger-nails were up to our wrists by the time she brought it. You can't rest when you are digging a geoduck, so Anne relieved Joan at the neck while Don began to dig with the shovel and Joan and I with our hands. We followed the neck down into the sand and water until finally I felt the edge of the shell. Then Don took over, digging round the shell with his hands, while I shovelled as fast as I could, Anne held on to the neck, Joan bailed with an old coffee tin and the tide hurried in with gallons more water. We were all fully dressed in jeans and sweat shirts, and covered with sand. People began coming up to watch, until we had an audience of fifteen or so. We spoke but didn't dare stop because of the tide. We kept taking turns holding on to the neck. The hole was the size of a crater and it was almost noon when at last, with a terrific sucking noise, Don pulled out the geoduck.

It was a big one. The oblong shell, covered with a dirty, yellow, wrinkled skin, was about seven inches long and five inches wide. It must have weighed at least five pounds. After everyone in our audience had examined it we took it home, cut it out of the shell, put it through the food chopper and made it into patties. They were heavenly.

Also edible and free on our own property are blackberries, salmon berries, huckleberries, watercress, Chinese pheasants and shaggy-mane mushrooms. And besides all this, we get occasional bonanzas by beachcombing. The best was that first winter during the war when coffee and cigarettes were often unobtainable.

We had had a fierce storm and the next morning, being Sunday, we all went down to the beach to, as Don always says, "see what God hath wrought." There, scattered along the tide line, were a dozen wooden boxes. When pried open they revealed Army rations including some tins containing, among other things, three cigarettes and a packet of powdered coffee.

We often get row-boats, but honesty and the knowledge that ours also occasionally goes adrift prevent our keeping them. However, there is an unwritten agreement that finders are keepers on pike, poles, rafts, shovels, toy boats, buckets, and so on.

Beachcombing is fun even when your only reward is a pretty piece of

driftwood. Going down to the beach after a storm, I always experience that joyous childhood feeling of expectancy. "After all," I used to tell Anne and Joan, "the Pacific Ocean stretches from the Arctic to the Antarctic and is as old as the earth. It might bring us *anything*!"

SOME TIME in early November, during my lunch half-hour, I went into a ten-cent store to buy some pot-holders and came across bins and bins of bulbs marked SPECIAL TODAY—EIGHTY-NINE CENTS PER DOZEN. Glipped to the top of each bin was a lavishly coloured picture—daffodils with trumpets like Gabriel's horn, tulips larger than brandy glasses, hyacinths the size of bridesmaids' muffs.

Quickly I took out my purse and counted the grocery money. That night when I came in the door with two shopping bags, the girls said, "Hooray, apples at last!" I said, "No, I've got something perfectly wonderful for all of us but I'm not going to show you until after dinner."

After dinner while the girls were washing and chipping the dishes, I spread newspapers on the dining-room table and dumped out the shopping bags. The bulbs were in small brown paper sacks marked "Hycht-bl"—"Dfdl-emp"—"Chndx," etc. I called to the family to come and see Mommy's surprise.

After carefully balancing a greasy skillet on top of a glass, then adding some soapy silverware and a muffin tin with half a wet muffin still in it, Joan came to the kitchen door, looked at the heaps of little bags and said brightly, "Oh, boy, dried apricots?"

"Guess again," I said.

Anne picked up "Chndx," spelt it out loud and said accusingly, "You've been to that health store again!"

Don rather gingerly opened a bag and took out what looked like a tiny brown withered hand. With a cry of delight, he said, "Italian mushrooms!"

I grabbed the bag away from him. "You're all pigs," I said. "All you think about is food. These are bulbs! Hyacinths and daffodils and tulips and all kinds of beautiful things." I brushed the little sacks of bulbs back into the shopping bag.

Much later, while we listened to the ten-o'clock news, Don said, "I

think we should plant all those bulbs in the woods and let them naturalize. I think all flowers should grow naturally. I'll put the crocuses and daffodils in the woods by the spring."

"We never go up there."

Don said, "It wouldn't take much work to widen that footpath."

I said, "Well, you widen the footpath. Only it should be iris because they like water."

"Iris. That's what I was thinking of. Did you get any?"

"No," I said.

We were in bed reading and smoking one last cigarette when Don suddenly thrust a copy of *House Beautiful* under my nose and said, "See, that's what I mean." The magazine was open at a coloured plate of a forty-roomed house with at least one hundred and fifty acres of lawn. Flowing off into the distance was a golden river of daffodils. "Naturalized," Don said.

Even though we couldn't agree as to where the bulbs should be planted, we decided that we would do something about them that week-end. But Friday afternoon Anne's and Joan's friends Marilyn and Joanne arrived to stay until Sunday night, and on Saturday morning early Don and I were awakened by the four girls standing at the foot of our bed, making gagging noises and holding their noses.

"Sobethig sbells awful!" Joan said.

"Sobethig has died under the house," Anne wailed. "Why does sobethig like this always have to happed whed we have company?" (Especially Marilyn, whose mother had a green Cadillac and a Filipino houseboy but whose little girl I noted had a very dirty neck and no buttons on her pyjamas.)

So Don spent all day Saturday and all day Sunday easing himself head first over the hot-water tank, which had been carefully set up in the only entrance to the underneath part of the house, and then crawling unenthusiastically about in the dirt and rubble, trying to find the rat. I held the torch and handed him the poker, while the girls said, "Ugh! Haven't you found it yet?"

In between times I cooked, tidied up, made fudge, listened to long recitals of "then I said and she said and he said and the stupid teacher said," and gave my opinions on the subjects of Betty Grable, Lana

Turner, Van Johnson, Frank Sinatra, pink lipstick, toe-nail polish, speed-boats and smoking, and withheld my opinion on the subject of Marilyn's beautiful mother and her strapless dresses and green Cadillac, about which we heard far too much.

Finally it was Sunday night. Marilyn and Joanne had been driven to the ferry; Don had located the rat in the motor of the refrigerator; nobody had been able to find Joan's geography book; Don was helping Anne with a theme on "My Happy Week-End"; and the bulbs were still in their little bags.

"We'll plant the bulbs next week-end for sure," I told Don later as he mournfully brushed his teeth with salt and bicarbonate of soda because I had spent the money for Psdnt-wht on Chndxa-bl.

The next week-end we had a terrific storm. The sort of storm where the wind grabbed the cedar tree right outside the kitchen window and bent it over like a croquet hoop. It did not rain in the conventional drop or pitter-patter sense. Water was just dumped on us like someone emptying a hot-water bottle. The eaves, troughs and gutters were completely defeated and water ran from the edges of the roof in shiny isinglass sheets.

Don and Joan put on oilskins and brought up creosote logs which made a roaring fire. We had a cosy time popping corn, reading aloud and making records of the girls singing "Tangerine" in high nervous voices and Don singing "Rock of Ages" confidently off key, but the bulbs stayed in the little bags.

Then it was February and I had been fired from my job and was staying at home, trying to be a writer, and one day the sun came out and I began working in the garden and saw small green spikes and I remembered about the bulbs still in their little sacks. Being entirely inexperienced I called Mother and asked her if I could plant the bulbs or did I have to wait until next year.

She said, "Stick them in. They will be late but it can't be helped. Be sure and put some bone meal under each bulb."

I also asked her to identify the green spikes.

She said, "Daffodils and narcissus, probably. I'll come out one of these days and take a look. I love to poke about in an old garden and see what is coming up."



So I planted them in masses and they all grew, were almost as big as the pictures and, for the first time in my life, I could pick an armful of blue hyacinths.

I learned that first spring that gardening is for very small children and adults. The in-betweeners' only interest in it is picking flowers for their hair. From the day of the first camellia, which was some time in January, Anne and Joan left for school looking from the front like natives about to attend a fiesta; from the back, with their tea-towel bandannas, run-down shoes and long boys' shirts, like old peasants going out to gather faggots.

I also learned that first spring how riotously things grow here on Vashon. We cleared land in January and by June it was a jungle again. I sent away for a dwarf white buddleia guaranteed not to exceed thirty

inches. It now stands over my head and there are millions of little dwarf (hah) white buddleias flourishing round the mother plant. The blossoms are a pure white, lilac-shaped, and lovely if you can see them without tipping over backward.

Yet neither Don nor I are true gardeners. I rush out seasonally and put in long hours for a short period. Don prunes things that should never be pruned, digs tiny holes and rams in huge balls of roots, divides by brute force and lifts with a yank. It is very irritating to have the things he plants so markedly grow.

To celebrate our first Valentine's Day on Vashon, Anne and Joan brought me a fallow, trembly, pale pink camellia in a little pink pot. I stuck it in a bed and the next year it had four blossoms. After a while we put in a gas furnace. "The exhaust has to come out here (right by the camellia)," the furnaceman said sternly. I was worried. "Shall I move it?" I said, and



then forgot all about the camellia. Just now I went out and looked at it to make sure I was not dreaming and the camellia is taller than I am, five feet six and three quarters inches in my stocking feet and I have on shoes (just for a lark, of course); it is well branched and loaded with blossoms. Either it likes gas fumes or this is Shangri-La.

All this vigour is due to an unbeatable combination of salt air, the Japanese Current, continual rain, hundreds of years of leaf mould washed down every winter, and cool summers. Honesty demands that I go on and say that these things affect weeds the way they affect non-weeds. What do you think of horse-tail that pushes its head right through asphalt paving? Wild cucumber that climbs to the tops of maples? Wild morning-glory sneaking across the guest-house porch, in the door and round the leg of the Franklin stove?

There is also the little matter of things taking hold—ajuga, for instance. I love its blue blossoms and lovely copper-coloured leaves, so I put a clump here and there. Before I could say "*atropurpurea*" it had completely obliterated the guest-house path, killed all the rock-roses, and was getting ready to rip the slates off the roof. Mother and I yanked it out and moved it clear up into the deep woods, about ten acres away. Yesterday I was attracted by a brilliant patch of blue at the edge of the woods. It was the ajuga in full brilliant battle-dress, standing tall, heads erect, marching towards home.

BEFORE EMBARKING on life on an island I had visions of jelly-making bees, community suppers, berrying expeditions, and so on. All wrong. At least for us year-rounders. We go along for months, even years,



thinking of each other, intending to get together but not quite making it unless we happen to board the same ferry.

This is not due to unfriendliness but to unseen forces such as the bark tide which kept Don and me from making our semi-yearly call on charming neighbours who live way down the beach—nine houses away.

Boiling over with good intentions, we had left the house one sunny October afternoon. We got as far as the sea-wall; then we saw it, The most magnificent bark tide of the year. From Dolphin Point clear past the old dock, huge brown slabs of bark lay along the water's edge like seals. We rushed back to the house for our bags and gloves and got to work. Hours later our beach was clean, the sea-wall was piled high and we were too tired to go anywhere but home. However, as we worked we did stop occasionally to wave at our neighbours who, like sandpipers, could be seen darting about on their beaches gathering up the bonanza. A doctor, an insurance man, a lawyer, a shipbuilder, a banker, a newspaper publisher, all enjoying for an hour or two the same goal.

For the first few years after we moved to the beach, our only year-round neighbours were the Russells. They bought their house the same time as we did, and during those first years we were drawn together by mutual hardships and mutual enjoyments.

The Russells were neighbours in the true, old-fashioned, almost forgotten, calf's-foot-jelly sense of the word. A plate never returned empty. Tea and cucumber sandwiches in the afternoon. Half a fresh cake left on the kitchen table. Chicken broth for the ailing. "I'm rowing to the store, what can I get you?" To us the word "neighbour" is a warm, tangible thing instead of merely nomenclature for the people next door.

As time went on, other summer people girded up their loins and became year-rounders. Now, even on nights when the wind grabs the giant firs and shakes them until their cones rattle on the roof, the clouds explode with rain and the waves attack the sea-walls like charging bulls, we can look along our curve of beach and count seven beacons of friendship.

As I have said, it takes a certain native hardiness to enjoy living on an island and this hardiness comes to the surface during crises. Take the case of our neighbour with four large married sons. She is small and dainty and looks younger than her daughters-in-law but has been known

to move a half-ton rock or haul manure three miles for her garden. And what do you think of a woman who can entertain an entire Camp-fire Group for a long rainy week-end in a small servantless house when somebody left the bag containing the sausages and marshmallows on the dock? This same woman, who is my favourite neighbour, asked for and got six grandchildren under six years old for a two weeks' visit. Her magic formula for dealing with children is ignoring all faults and accenting tiny virtues. She always tells whiners how charming they are—bullies how brave—bad sports how good—sneaks how honest! This formula also works on husbands.

For several summers our beach rang with the laughter and other noises of twenty-eight children under twelve. Now most of those are grown but a large new generation is gaining ground rapidly. Down by the point there is a fine big family with nine children, most of whom are married and have children of their own. The fourth from the top or from the bottom, I am not sure which, with her husband and three children has recently become a year-rounder. She has deep dimples and many talents, not the least of which is the ability to smile when thirty-eight relatives with children arrive for the week-end.

Island men are even harder than island women, especially those enduring the daily grind of travelling to town, supplemented by walking a small narrow slippery footpath in the rain. On week-ends an island man cuts wood, goes fishing, paints his name on his sea-wall, mends the drain-pipes, shoots at bottles, gathers bark, prunes the apple-trees, baits the rat-traps, tends the outboard motor, caulks the row-boat and puts out the crab-trap.

We didn't meet all the regular inhabitants of our beach for several years, as many of the men were in the Services. Some of the houses were let and, though we were moderately friendly with the tenants, I cannot easily recall most of them.

When I say this I am excepting Lesley Arnold, who, in addition to a husband in the Navy and thirty-one coats, including one lined with real leopard, had large purple eyes which she seemed to keep focused on Don.

It was our first spring on the island. I was painting the porch furniture and humming and being happy and trying not to care that I worked

harder than anyone in the whole world and was apparently going to be buried in my tan knitted suit. I had just discovered that the word "folding," stamped on the bottom of the chairs I was painting, meant "with a hammer," when Anne and Joan came bounding in and announced breathlessly that some new people named Arnold had moved to Vashon and "Mrs. Arnold is about your age only *awfully pretty* with *beautiful* clothes," Anne said. "She gave us a Coke and her husband is in California, so I invited her to dinner. Her name is Lesley and she said we could call her it. She's adorable, Mommy, and she's brown and has a perfect figure."

A strange chilly premonition swept over me, but I said, "How nice. What time did you tell her to come?"

"I didn't tell her any time," Anne said. "I just said dinner. What smells so awful, dinner?"

"Turpentine," I said. "I'll call Mrs. Arnold."

A gust of wind lifted the newspapers I had spread on the porch, wrapping them round the freshly painted chairs. "Oh, drat!" I said, slapping furiously at the papers.

"You've got white paint in your hair," Joan said.

Anne said, "What are you going to wear tonight, Mommy?"

"I hadn't thought. But undoubtedly my tan knitted suit."

"What are we going to have to eat?" Joan asked.

"Oxtails," I said.

"Oxtails!" Anne wailed. "Why don't we have fried chicken?"

"Because," I said crossly, "I've got oxtails already in the oven."

"But oxtails sound so *cheap*," Anne said. "What else are we going to have?"

"Carrots and mushrooms, mashed potatoes and gravy, salad and that cut-up fruit stuff made with pineapple and coconut."

"I'll make an angel-food cake," Anne said.

"You can't. Not enough eggs," I said. I stood up and stretched.

Anne said, "I wish we had a *fresh* pineapple and a *real* coconut."

"It'll be just as good without," I said. "I'll put some mint in it. I'm going in to call Mrs. Arnold."

Lesley Arnold's voice was husky to that fascinating point just short of asthma. She was easy and absolutely sure of herself. She said she'd

love to come to dinner and, with a tiny laugh, couldn't she come early and help. I said no, but to come early and have a Martini. She said, "Anne and Joan are so adorable. I do hope they'll be at home."

"They will," I said. "They think you are beautiful and glamorous and can hardly wait to see you."

"The lambs," she said.

I went upstairs, took a bath, mostly with turpentine to get the white paint off, put on my tan knitted suit, lots of perfume, heavy gold jewellery and heavy make-up. When I came into the kitchen Joan said, "Wow, your eyebrows are dark!"

Anne said, "I think you look glamorous but I wish you'd wear more eye shadow. *Charm* magazine says that everybody should wear eye shadow, even in the daytime."

Lesley Arnold was so beautiful she made me slightly sick in my stomach. She had large purple—really purple—eyes, small regular features, glistening white teeth, and hair, the colour of unbleached muslin, pulled back from her sun-browned face. She had on a goldy-brown sleeveless dress, cut very low, a white cashmere cardigan, huge topaz-and-diamond ear-rings and three heavy topaz-and-diamond bracelets. Her slender brown feet were wrapped in natural-leather thongs. She made me feel just like a hygiene teacher. A hot hygiene teacher in an ugly tan knitted suit, the wrong shoes and no husband.

Don, my honest, blunt Scotsman, was so dashing (drooling?) that even the girls were impressed. After dinner some of the beach people came up and we played records and were terribly gay until after three o'clock. Lesley was certainly very very attractive. At least I thought so until she pushed me up against the ice-box and said, "I've asked your big handsome husband to walk me home—do you mind?"

"Help yourself—take two," I said, my eyes on the dripping ice-tray I was holding.

"Can I have a kiss, too?" she said.

"Why don't you ask *him*?" I said.

By the time Don got home I had washed the dishes, emptied all the ash-trays, even vacuumed. (I didn't want anybody getting up in divorce court and saying I hadn't done my share.) Don said, "I hurried as fast as I could."

"Those things take time," I said.

"What things?" he asked.

"Things like kissing Lesley," I said.

"Oh, that," Don said. "She asked me to kiss her so I pecked her on the cheek."

We were all supposed to go to Lesley's for breakfast the next morning and then to someone else's house for sandwiches. But somehow or other I was making clam fritters at eleven and hamburgers at four and, in between, Lesley took everybody, especially the men, down to her house while I cleaned up the mess and made things attractive again. I may have been a little curt when they came back the second time because Lesley said, "Why, Betty, I believe you're jealous."

"Jealous?" I said. "Of course I'm not."

Anne, who had been helping me, said, "But she *is* jealous. She's mad because you asked Don to kiss you, and Joan and I are too." Her eyes were blazing.

Lesley put her arm round Anne and said, "Why, baby, Betty and I were just joking. She's not jealous of me. You and Joanie bring your hamburgers and come and sit by me." And lucky old unjealous Mommy had to cook them.

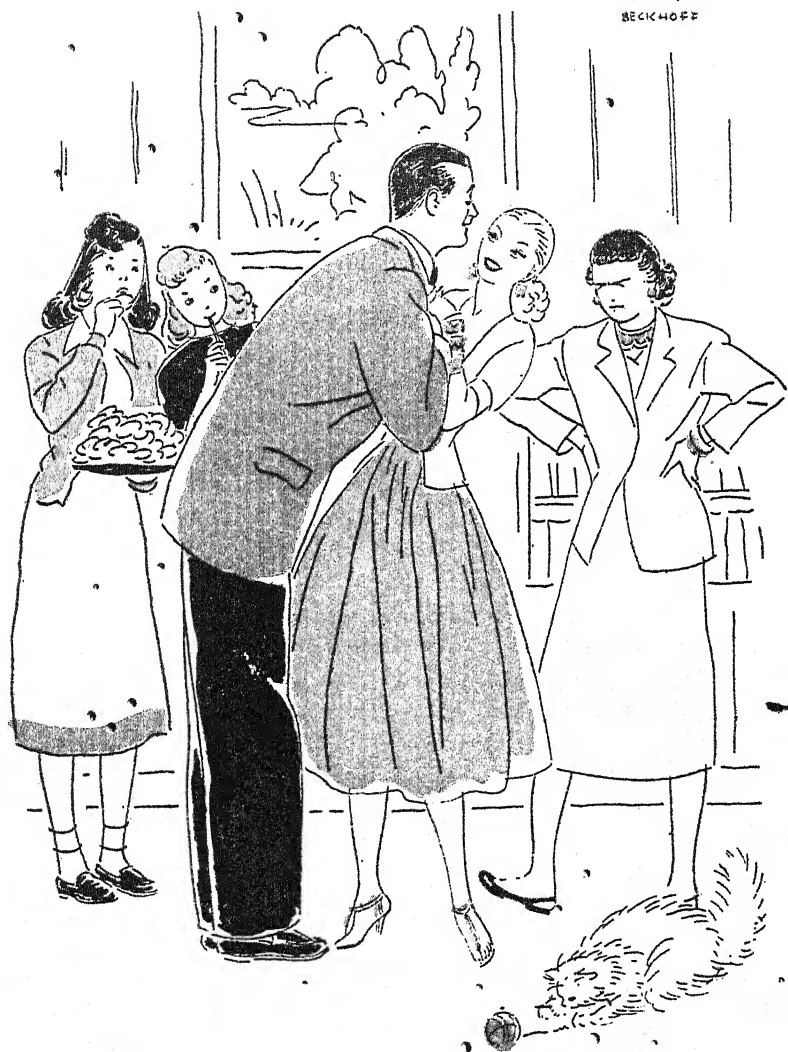
Then there was the night Anne and Joan were visiting in town and Don and I planned to have dinner at the Vashon restaurant, and go to the Vashon film show.

— We were sitting in the kitchen discussing this fabulous outing when Lesley called and said wouldn't we go down. I said that we were going out to dinner. She said come down for a drink then as she was all alone, and Johnny wasn't coming home until the next Wednesday, and wouldn't we please. It was a nasty rainy night and I felt sorry for her so, like a fool, I asked her to have dinner and go to the show with us. She said she would, but only if we would go down to her house first. So we went and she had on black velvet slacks and diamonds and French perfume, and the minute we walked in she told Don how tired he looked, how absolutely worn out.

This time she made me feel like a great big botany teacher in tweeds and without a husband.

After Lesley had been gay, Don had been tired and I'd been

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uncomfortable for about an hour, I said, "Come on, let's go. I'm starving and the show starts at eight ten."

"Show?" Lesley said. "What show?"

"The film at Vashon. I told you on the phone we were going."

"Now, Betty," she said, "be reasonable. It's a terrible night and Don is so tired. You don't want to drag him out into the rain and cold just to see a film."

"I do too," I said.

Lesley laughed and said, "Oh, Betty, you're priceless." Then she got up and went out into the kitchen.

Old Dead Tired was gazing into the fire.

I went upstairs and splashed cold water on my forehead until I was quite sure I wouldn't have a stroke. When I came down Lesley was setting up a card table in front of the fire.

I said, "We're going out to dinner."

She said, "You just relax. I've got dinner all ready."

She brought in one of those revolting ripe-olive, macaroni, brussels-sprouts, chestnut casseroles so dear to the heart of the unimaginative cook. However, if it had been English lark in Madeira I couldn't have eaten a bite, I was so furious.

Tired Old Don managed to dredge up enough strength to sit at the table, but I could tell he wasn't enthusiastic about the food. At least he still preferred my cooking.

When we were walking up the beach on our way home I said, "Don, how could you let her do that to me?"

"Do what?" Don asked. "Didn't you have a good time?"

I said, "We planned to go out and she didn't want to go, so we didn't." Out there on the beach it sounded senseless.

Don said, "Look, the stars are out. We might have a clear day for a change. Say, you'd better teach Lesley how to cook."

"I couldn't teach that woman *anything*," I said.

And so the summer went on and on and on and on. Lesley took sun baths all day and wore different real jewels and a different new dress every night. Every afternoon at about five thirty she would call to get Don to help her pull up her boat, carry her groceries, saw up her logs, mend her stove or check her wiring, and she was clever enough to make

it sound natural. Don liked her, and Anne and Joan still adored her and they all made me feel like Typhoid Mary if I criticized her even the tiniest bit.

Don said, "Why are you so stinking about Lesley? She's a nice gal and she's lonely."

"Yes, lonely for *my* husband," I said.

"You're being ridiculous," Don said, but I think we were both relieved when she moved to San Francisco in October. Anne and Joan were inconsolable.

"She had three Dior dresses," Anne told her friends.

"And real diamonds and rubies," Joan said.

"And she had a perfect figure, thirty-six-inch bust, twenty-four-inch waist and thirty-four-inch hips," Anne said. "Her hair was platinum and she had great big violet eyes, and whenever her tan faded even a little she took an aeroplane to *Hawaii!*"

"Somebody set the table," I shouted rudely. "It's almost seven."

"Gosh, you're crabby!" Anne and Joan said together.



THERE is no doubt about it: dog loving is closely related to the pounding-yourself-on-the-head-with-a-hammer-because-it-feels-so-pleasant-when-you-stop school of masochism. But there are a great many of us dog lovers on Vashon Island and a great variety of dogs. Our Tudor, part Welsh terrier, part beagle, part rattlesnake and part mule, has fought them all.

In spite of the fact that he has never learned *anything*—we have replaced eight panes of glass in one door because he always goes into the house like a policeman answering a cry for help—Tudor is really very clever.

All dog lovers say this, but we have proof because Tudor learned Japanese. When we took a trip to New York we farmed the girls out

with relatives and left Tudor and Murra (our then cat) with a caretaker named Warner Yamamoto, who assured us his family "loved ahnimahl and will feed."

When we returned Murra was living on the mantelpiece and looking down on everybody with complete disdain. Tudor didn't even look like the same dog. He kept his head down close to the ground and didn't speak English.

"Oh, Tudor, baby, we're home," I carolled to him as I got out of the car.

With a sidelong, unfathomable "wisdom-of-the-East" look, he sidled up to Mrs. Yamamoto. She spoke to him in Japanese and he licked her hand.

"Come here, old boy," Don called heartily.

Tudor turned his head away and lowered his eyes, which seemed darker and more almond-shaped. Warner said something to him in Japanese and Tudor slithered over to him.

For over a month he picked at his food and ignored us when we spoke to him. Mother suggested that we learn Japanese and speak to him in his adopted tongue but we refused and, gradually, he returned to normal, and when we called "Here, boy," at least glanced at us before running in the opposite direction.

Tudor has his own nice little smelly bed, but he prefers to risk a daily beating with the hearth broom and sleep on any bed, chair or couch not barricaded with spiky objects. He growls at babies. He snarls at all milkmen, laundrymen and neighbours. When his water bowl is empty he takes it in his teeth and pounds it furiously on the kitchen floor. His



favourite resting places are in any doorway you intend to go through with a loaded tray, or the middle of the stairway in the dark. He has no gallantry and prefers to fight female puppies. He is fifteen, which is one hundred and five in dog years, but age has neither aged nor softened him.

Mother remarked the other day, "Poor Tudor, he is getting so deaf." What she



means is that he is stone deaf to any command, but can hear a plate being scraped in Sitka, Alaska.

Several years ago a raccoon decided to be our friend. We saw her first on the kitchen patio eating Tudor's food. The next night, naturally, Tudor didn't leave any food so Raccy came to the window and explained the situation. I mixed up a dish of dog food, some left-over gravy, four old muffins and a rock-hard piece of fruit-cake and put the dish outside. As soon as I had gone indoors Mrs. Raccy waddled over and began eating. She chose the fruit-cake first, and finding it delightful held it in both her little hands and nibbled round it the way a child nibbles round the edge of a cake. Mother said that I should also have put out some water as raccoons like to dip their food in it, and the next night when our new friend peered in the dining-room window I took out both supper (corn on the cob, mashed potatoes, chicken gravy and a green salad) and a dish of water. She appreciated the water, dipping each bite, but she tossed the salad into the primroses.

The next spring when Mrs. Raccy returned she brought along a husband and two half-grown children. We were of course very glad to see them (all except Tudor) and I mixed up a big batch of food for them. Then I put a basket of left-over chocolate Easter eggs out on the patio by the dining-room window. As soon as they had finished the entrée the



Raccy family came round for dessert. Mr. and Mrs. Raccy, though dainty at table and splendid about sharing, were very shy and ducked when we opened the door. The babies were quarrelsome and piggish about the chocolate but would eat out of our hands and showed strong leanings towards coming in the house and living with us.

We are now feeding six racoons, and all but two of them eat out of our hands.

Bucky, the deer, was our friend for over six years. Often, in the very early morning, we could hear his footsteps like tack hammers on the front porch. Once I looked out of our bedroom window in that indistinct smudgy time when there is only a thread of silver across the darkness in the east, and saw Bucky come up the steps from the lower terrace on to the patio. He walked round, nibbling daintily at the flowers. Finally surfeited with snapdragons and zinnias, he slowly, majestically climbed the steps through the upper rockery and vanished.

One early morning he brought his doe and fawn down for a swim. Once we saw him running along the beach with vines in his antlers. We have seen him many times in the orchard, standing as still as the mist round his knees. He disappeared the year they opened season for deer on the island.

The sport who shot Bucky deserves the same badge of courage as the duck shooter who last autumn rowed up in front of our sea-wall and, when our flock of pet ducks hurried out to greet him, shot and killed all but four.

IN my early island days I cuddled a cosy notion that our country repairmen might not have as big tool kits as their city brothers but they were a *lot* more willing and *much* cheaper. The willing part is true enough. The local handyman, always referred to as "Nipper" or "Gimpy" or "Mrs. Walters's Harry," will mend anything, but the repair job is invariably left with tag ends. "The dish-washer's okay now, Betty," Mrs. Walters's Harry told me the time it insisted on using only cold water. "But remember, *no soap* and keep that big screwdriver of Don's handy, to pry the lid up."

Nipper will attempt anything. Need your row-boat caulked, your flowers transplanted, your Stradivarius tuned? Nipper will gladly do it,

but *first*, and I mean before one broken fingernail touches the job, he must send to Seattle for the most recent rate schedule for boat caulkers, landscape gardeners or Stradivarius repairmen.

Island repairmen also expect immediate payment. "Be sure and send the cheque tomorrow morning, Betty—I'm real short of cash," New Motor Marvin told me after examining my steam-iron the time it boiled and boiled but wouldn't let out any steam. I set it out in the patio to blow up and Mother said, "Why don't you call Marvin? At least he can't say that needs a new motor." But he did, only he called it a "heat-control unit and it will run you into maybe twenty-twenty-five dollars."

One year, during a big snow, the pipes froze and then sprang a leak up the hill by the spring. While the snow was still on the ground, an all-male delegation of neighbours, mostly summer people, called on us. "The spring," they told us with great seriousness, "is on your property, but it is a community thing. We *all* have water rights. We *all* work together. We will *all* repair the pipe. *Do not do anything yourself!*"

"What darling people," I said to Don later. "I just love community spirit. I am so glad we live on an island."

Don said, "Did they say *when* we were *all* going to repair the pipe?"

"I don't think they said when exactly," I said, "but I imagine it will be this afternoon."

But it wasn't that afternoon or the next or the next. Finally Don and Anne and Joan went to the spring and wound rags and tape round the worst places in the pipe and that is the way it stayed until late spring when Don got hold of Zachary Millard Potts (coloured), who wore tropical shorts and a sun helmet even on rainy days, sang calypso songs in French and signed his work, especially the concrete variety: "Mended by Zachary M. Potts, 4/3/43." Zachary had no tools but he was very strong and could rip the threads off any diameter of pipe. Between cups of coffee (he had a very nervous stomach which could not stand being empty even a minute) and cigarettes which he borrowed from me, Zachary removed the broken pipe and put in the new one. He was very artistic and instead of burying the pipe in the humdrum fashion of the former plumber he allowed it to swoop in big natural curves, propping the lowest places with small forked willow twigs which rooted and eventually grew into little willow trees.

For a while after we moved to the island the Puget Sound Power and Light Company had an electrician who knew what he was doing and did it.

When the pump was clogged with silt, when we had no water pressure and somebody was hammering inside the hot-water tank, when I tried to unplug the vacuum cleaner and one prong came off and stuck in the wall socket—any of those little womanly emergencies—I called the Puget Sound Power and Light and they sent this nice man who located the trouble and also knew lots of interesting stories about buddies who grabbed live wires without their gloves.

Then for some reason the power company stopped this fine unselfish service and we were left with Orville Kronenburg, who hated everybody and whose wife wore her bedroom slippers in the street. Orville knew about electricity, I guess, but he didn't consider looks important and, unless you stopped him, he would run wires across doorways and over pictures.

There was also Mr. Curtis, the plumber, who put in our new bathroom so that anybody equipped with a wrench could have a shower or a bath as he wished.

Now when we want plumbing we call the television man, who relays the information to a friend of his who is reputed to plumb, but I wouldn't vouch for this as he never answers my calls and anyway Don gave me my own plumber's snake for a valentine.

It is really not fair to lump Tudor's friend Warner Yamamoto in with the island handymen because he was not really an islander nor handy. We got hold of him through the U.S. Relocation Centre, a sort of clearing-house for Japanese who had been interned during the war. Don and I felt very sorry for the returning Japanese who could not find places to stay and so we offered Warner our house for the six months we would be away on a trip. We also offered a dollar an hour for any work he did while we were away.

Warner did not show up until half an hour before we were to leave, but I did manage to give him a few instructions such as: "You might divide this enormous clump of Siberian iris and clear off that hillside." Of course I meant clear off the weeds.

We were in New Mexico when we got a rather frantic letter from

Mother saying, "Are you planning to cement the bank in front of the house? Warner has cleared off every living thing and is smoothing the dirt with a trowel." The next report was received in Dallas, Texas. "No need to cement the bank," Mother wrote. "Warner has divided the iris and is setting it out, spear by spear in neat rows over the entire bank. The place is beginning to look like a rice paddy."

Our first card from Warner said:

Am thanking God for opportunity to stay in this beautiful place.  
Earthquake did not do too much damage.

Your friend,

WARNER YAMAMOTO

Wildly we called Mother. What earthquake, she asked? We haven't had any. Don said it must have been the wash from an aircraft carrier pounding the beach.

The next card was received in Tampa, Florida. It said:

Am thanking God for opportunity to be in this beautiful country.  
Still raining. Big slides not too near house.

Your friend,

WARNER YAMAMOTO

We called Mother again. She said, "An old snag fell across the road and brought down a little dirt. The place really looks like a rice paddy now. Warner has taken all the flowers out of the rockeries and thrown them away. He has almost finished filling the crevices with iris spears."

But Warner Yamamoto did have a green thumb and now we have more Siberian iris than Wayside Gardens. He also had a very pretty wife who spoke little English, had obviously never held a broom in her moth-like hands, but wished to help me with the housework, so Warner informed me, after we had come home and they had settled elsewhere on the island.

As the female counterpart of the handyman is difficult to come by—*island* people being very proud and housework being considered menial, which it certainly is—take it from a *menial* who knows—I naturally snapped up Fumiko with no questions asked but several answered such as—How much pay an hour? Not do windows? Eight o'clock morning okay? Scrubbing floors too hard, yes?





The first morning Fumiko staggered in with an armload of Japanese records and old photographs. For several hours we sat on the couch and looked at faded pictures. Occasionally Fumiko would say, "Mama," and point at one tiny figure in an enormous group in front of a temple. "Mama beautiful," I would say politely, pointing at what I thought was Mama. Fumiko would burst into giggles. "That Papa." "Well," I'd say, standing up, "I guess we had better get started." "More picture," Fumiko would say, quickly turning the page. "See, brozzer."

When we finished the photographs she took out the records and her fans. To "Oh Beautiful Hiroshima in Cherry Blossom Time" (I think) she performed a long long series of small steps and angular postures. Then it was lunch-time. I set a place at the kitchen table and made sandwiches. She watched.

While she was eating, I sneaked down to the beach. Japanese people are notably polite and I thought that Fumiko thought that as long as I was in the house she must entertain me. About two o'clock I looked up and saw all the living-room rugs hanging over the porch railing.

"Ah, that's more like it," I said to Tudor. At five thirty when I came back the rugs were still hanging on the railing, the floor was unswept, the lunch dishes were on the table, and from our bathroom upstairs I could hear a voice humming "Oh Beautiful Hiroshima in Cherry Blossom Time."

At six thirty, Warner came for Fumiko. She was still upstairs and the rugs were still on the railing. He called to her in Japanese and she came tripping down. "Le's see—eight o'clock to six thirty—that ten dollah fifty cent plus onè dollah cah fah."

None of the beds had been touched and crumpled towels still littered the bathrooms, but the brass fixtures on our bath had been polished until they looked like gold.

Margaret, who came next, used a gallon of wax a week. She was very pretty but had a low I.Q. One day I found her waxing round a slice of bread on the draining-board. What was worse, she was using the floor polisher with the long handle. "Margaret," I said sternly, "I've told you again and again that when you wax round a slice of bread you should use a *cloth*."

Each Monday, Wednesday and Friday as Margaret ate her lunch, she told me about her boy friends. One day she said, "Mrs. MacDonald, you wanta know why I got so many boy friends?"

I said, "I imagine it is because you're so pretty."

"Uh-uh," she said, taking a reflective bite of oatmeal cake. "It's because *like* 'em to git fresh with me."

IT SEEMS to be an accepted fact that the happy woman is the woman who has some interest other than bearing children and the subsequent laundry and cooking and sweeping. These back-breaking tasks are her lot and she is expected to perform them with quiet efficiency, but, we are told, the discussion of them is not at all interesting to her

husband—that lucky pup who goes to town every day to meet new people and eat in restaurants. If you want to keep your husband's love, so they say, you should always look pretty, be fun, keep your house immaculate, *and* have outside interests. There is one thing to be said for this: it offers a challenge—a challenge about as easy as getting along with Russia.

When we moved to Vashon Island my outside interest was working for that contractor, and I could fill up the evenings telling my husband and children how tired I was, how incompetent everybody else in our organization was, and so on.

Then in February my sister Mary decided that I should become a writer and introduced me to an editor who told me to bring him a five-thousand-word outline of my book. Never having dreamed of writing a book, I was not as quick with the outline as I might have been. In fact, I had to stay home from work to write, and some pal in the office told the boss what I was doing and I was instantly fired and thus became rather unwittingly an author.

The job of being a lady writer without any regular salary has always been regarded by my family with the same tolerant amusement they accord my efforts towards making my own Christmas cards. "All I ask," I tell them, "is one quiet spot where I can write." (This is a lie, of course, and they know it. What I really want is a million dollars so I won't ever have to write another word.) When I am writing I itch and hate my family, especially during that painful period known as "getting into the book."

I have tried writing in the kitchen, the dining-room, the living-room, our bedroom, the guest-house, the porch, the patio—it is always the same. I am first, last and always a wife and mother and must stop whatever I am doing to—"try and remember where you left the big screw-driver"—"I am up in Vashon and I've lost the list; what was it you wanted?"—"give me the recipe for chicken in olive oil and wine"—"I'm bringing the children over for the week-end."

Most frequently of all I must stop for guests.

"One reason I'm glad we have this house," Anne said, when we moved to Vashon, "is because now I can invite all my friends to visit me."

I said, "We can *all* invite our friends, and if we feel like singing 'The Star-Spangled Banner' at three a.m. we can."

As it turned out, we did invite our friends, and I learned straight away that the big difference between island entertaining and any other kind is that on an island guests stay all night or for two weeks or a couple of years.

Even the few good sports who try to go home usually miss the last ferry or the ferry company hears you are entertaining and stops running their boats just for the hell of it.

Luckily, I like to cook. Don does, too, but like most males in the kitchen even the making of a fried-egg sandwich produces in him the attitude of a Vienna-trained surgeon repairing the trachea of a newborn baby. "Hand me that pan! Where is the butter? Now some coarse ground pepper—careful, not too much. Is the bread buttered? Heat the plates! Have you made the coffee? Hand me the spatula, no, the big one." He demands much of his staff as he busies himself turning the clean kitchen into something that looks as if it had been attacked by a gang of teen-age vandals.

One of Don's culinary specialties is Monte Cristo sandwiches, elaborate concoctions dipped in egg and fried in butter. He will make them any time for anybody but prefers serving them to favourite friends about three a.m.

Which brings me to our second New Year's Eve on Vashon, when we had invited some of our dearest friends to celebrate.

As the morning of New Year's Eve dawned I realized that I had the flu. I was hot and my chest hurt and I didn't even want to read. Don brought me a cup of coffee and two aspirin tablets and asked me wistfully if I didn't feel well enough "to get up now?" I got up, washed my face, then got straight back into bed.

At lunch-time Anne brought me a bowl of soup she had made specially and asked me hopefully if I didn't feel "like getting up now?" I ate the soup, took two more aspirins, got up and washed my face, then fell back into bed.

Later on, Joanie built a fire in the bedroom fireplace and Anne brought me a pot of tea.

"Now do you feel like getting up?" they asked anxiously.

"I feel terrible," I said. "You'll have to be the hostesses tonight."

Don came in with some fuel for the fire and said, "Oh, just stay quiet and you'll feel fine by tonight."

But I didn't.

I felt worse if anything and finally reminded the family, who were still urging me to my post at the helm, that it was time they realized that I was not as big and strong as I apparently looked. Anne called Mother, who came out on the next ferry, and all I can say is that I know that there have been great strides made in psychiatry but just let somebody try to cut my umbilical cord. Mother merely walks into the house and there is peace. Peace and comfort.

"I feel terrible," I told her tearfully, "and I'm feverish and all Don and the girls do is try to prod me to my feet, like a sick horse. They're worried about that old party."

"I don't know why anyone should worry about the party," Mother said. "The house looks lovely, and there is plenty of food and drink. This will be good experience for the girls. I'm going to move you into my room away from the noise. I've got two hot-water bottles in the bed."

About two a.m. I was awakened from a deep sleep by Don switching on the light and slapping a plate on my chest. "Look what I brought you," he said proudly. "Eat it quick, while it's hot."

I knew it was a big, greasy, hot Monte Cristo sandwich. Weakly but kindly, I said, "I'm really not a bit hungry, dear."

"Of course you are," Don said heartily, turning on two more hundred-watt lights. "The trouble with you is that you haven't eaten all day. Anyway, this is the very first sandwich I have made tonight and I want you to taste it."

I said, "Why don't you taste it while I wake up?"

"Okay," Don said cheerfully, taking a huge bite.

While he was eating, Anne and Joan came in with a cup of coffee for me.

Joan said, "You had better get back to your cooking, Don; the whole house is filled with smoke."

As soon as he had gone, they both began to laugh hysterically.

"What's so funny?" I asked sleepily.

Anne said, "Don's using about a pound of butter for each sandwich and he has grease splattered clear up on those high windows."

"How is the party going?" I asked.

"All right," Anne said. "Everybody's talking loud and laughing."

"Don't you think you'd better go to bed?" I asked anxiously.

"You said we could stay up as late as we wanted on New Year's Eve," Anne said, yawning.

"I know," I said, "but aren't you tired?"

"Kind of," Anne said. "But we want to watch the people eat those awful sandwiches. Do you feel better now, Mommy?"

"Lots better," I said.

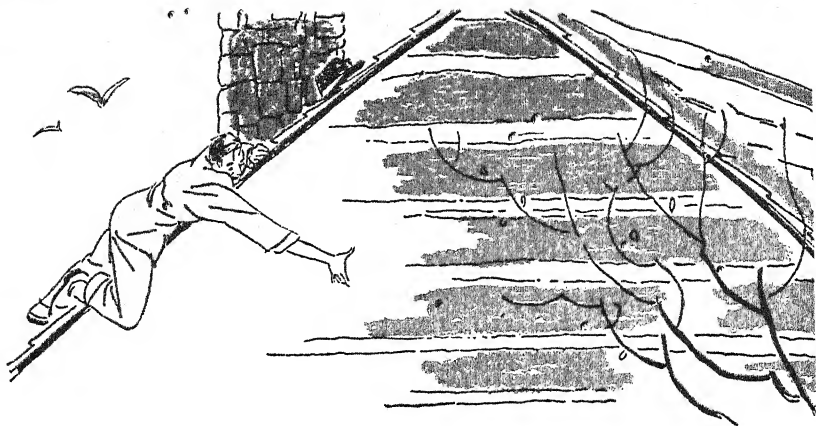
THERE ARE all kinds of guests. Fun, no-fun, alcoholic, old pals who have got rich and dull, old pals who haven't succeeded and are on the defensive, relatives, babies, foreign men who light my cigarettes lingeringly and tell me "Youth is so gauche, so raw," then try to lure Anne or Joan out on the porch, and F.B.I. agents who should open a school to train other guests.

One summer we let our house in Seattle (which we had bought for convenience while the girls were in their last years of high school on the mainland) to five F.B.I. agents with whom we naturally became friends and whom we naturally invited to spend their week-ends on Vashon and one of whom Joan later married. Now *that* was a summer I enjoyed.

They helped—in fact, did all the work, portioning it out in a most businesslike way and not accepting any excuses. They were good cooks, they were bright, they sang, they never got drunk, they liked children, they made the beds (there is a housewifely differentiation here between "made" and "spread up warm over the newspapers") and they loved the country.

As far as I am concerned J. Edgar Hoover can billet his whole staff on me any old time, for as long as he wants.

My idea of heaven is a house with twenty-four bedrooms and twenty-four bathrooms, thousands of guests, and no work to do. Since my alternative is a house with four bedrooms, three sofas, a lawn, swing, three chaise-longues and the floor, thousands of guests, many under four



years old, and no servants, I often go six months without getting to the beach.

Don says that my problem is that I don't relax. He usually says this to me early in the morning after I have been up until three o'clock anyway and then got up again with somebody small who has been sick in the upper bunk. I prefer to believe that all over the world there are wives who, under similar circumstances, are not relaxing.

There was, for instance, the Saturday afternoon when Don and the girls and I came staggering along the beach with our loads of groceries and a male voice yelled "Yoohoo!" at us from the roof of our house and it was Don's oldest buddy.

Although he did not come down off the roof, we could see clearly that Old Buddy's face was suspiciously flushed and that he was crawling about in none too steady a fashion. I sent Don out to "talk" to him while the girls and I put the groceries away. My sister Mary and some Navy people were expected on the next ferry, so I set Anne to making clam and cream cheese dip and Joan to filling little dishes with nuts and olives while I tidied. When I had finished, I opened the back door and called to Don to start the fire. Don didn't answer, but Buddy peered at me over the edge of the roof and said, "Heigh-ho!" I slammed back into the house and into Don, who was making two drinks.

"You've got to get him out of here," I said.





"Why?" Don asked mildly. "He's up on the roof out of the way. Just relax. Everything will work out all right."

He went out of the door carrying the two drinks.

Leaving Anne and Joan with the hors d'œuvres, I dashed upstairs to wash. From my open bedroom window, I heard Mary and the Navy people crunching along in the sand, and then from overhead I heard Buddy calling out to them, "Heigh-ho!"

Anne, who had come in to inspect my make-up and borrow a handful of perfume, said, "Oh, Mommy, honestly, I think he's perfectly disgusting. Can't we get rid of him?"

I said, "He's Don's oldest friend; we'll just have to be understanding."

It really wasn't too hard as Old Buddy stayed on the roof all evening, only asking for an occasional drink.

One of the Navy officers had brought a guitar and after dinner we went out on the porch in the moonlight and he played sad songs and sang to us. It must have been after three, when I was emptying ash-trays while Don called to me from the upper hall, "Why don't you come to bed?" that I remembered about Buddy and realized that we had not heard from him for some time.

"What are you going to do about Old Buddy?" I whispered hoarsely. "He's still out on the roof."

"Nothing," Don said. "His responsibility. Now come to bed."

The next thing I knew there was sunlight dappling the rug, and up from the patio floated the cheerful thrumming of a guitar.

"What happened to Old Buddy?" I asked Don.

Don said, "Take a look."

I walked to the window and looked out. Below me, spreadeagled in the lawn swing, a white goatskin rug clutched round his throat, was Old Buddy. One of the Navy officers was kneeling beside him strumming his guitar.

Anne and Joan and Mary came in with coffee.

Anne said, "You'd better hurry and drink this, Mommy. That Lieutenant-Commander and I have breakfast almost ready—buttermilk hot cakes and sausages."

Joan said, "What's that one's name with the guitar, Aunt Mary?"

"Johnny," Mary said.

"Well, Johnny and I are going sole spearing after breakfast."

Lighting a cigarette, Mary said, "It's heavenly out here, Betty. So relaxing."



THE TRICKY THING to remember about adolescents is that they are going to be miserable no matter what they are doing but they would rather be miserable doing the things *they* choose. This is all so easy for me to understand now that Anne and Joan are twenty-four and twenty-five, charming, intelligent, beautiful, companionable, adult and married. It was harder to remember when they were fourteen and fifteen, and bolted themselves in the bathroom for hours at a stretch and wore lipstick to bed.

Frankly I do not know any answer to adolescence. About the only thing to do is to try to hang on to your sanity and pray. While you are hanging on I will reach down into the black pit of my experience and give you a few things to think about:

1. Adolescents do not hate their parents. They merely feel absolute contempt, occasionally coated with condescending pity for them. They all refer to their father as "oh him" and their mother as "she": "*She* won't let me go, naturally." "Who was that on the phone? *Oh him.*"

2. All adolescents "go steady"—daughters with boys who appear to be oily, weak-chinned and untrustworthy; sons with girls who appear hard-eyed and brazen and, if not downright immoral, certainly not the sister type. No parent gets anywhere combatting these great romances. How can anyone as stupid as "oh him" evaluate a big wheel like Billy? (A big wheel who lies on the couch more than the dog and has a vocabulary of thirty words.)

"It just so happens that Billy is left-half in the football team and president of SqueeGees, *the* high school fraternity."

3. All adolescents telephone. This is part of the cohesive quality that makes them all eat in the same beanery, walk in bunches, keep in constant touch. (You will not solve anything by having two telephones. "Wow, two telephones!" Anne and Joan's friends said, and kept them both busy.)

4. All adolescents intend to have the family car all the time. To accomplish this they resort to the gentle nag or water-dripping-on-stone method, the smooth lie or the cold tearful silence.

5. Adolescents are not careful of their own possessions, but they are absolutely reckless with anything belonging to their parents.

6. All adolescent girls would prefer to live in a bathroom.

7. All adolescent boys would prefer to live in a car.

Examining in retrospect that first long wet difficult winter on Vashon, I am overcome by how wonderful Anne and Joan were. How co-operative and uncomplaining and hard-working and dear. They were such young girls to be getting wood, cooking dinner, making beds and smiling—and they did smile.

One stormy night, I remember, Don brought home to dinner a widower who lived by himself on the other side of the island. Anne, home from school with one of her fleeting ailments, had stuffed and baked a salmon and made an apple-pie. The man couldn't get over it. "That little girl, that wonderful little girl!" he said over and over again.

Joanie said, "I'm wonderful too, aren't I, Mommy? I rowed out and bought the salmon from the fishing-boat and I carried up a root so big Don can't get it in the fire-place."

"You don't know how fortunate you are," the old widower told Don and me, with tears in his eyes. "I've never seen anything like it." Anne and Joan glowed like fireflies and in his honour after dinner, when they were doing the dishes, kept their fighting down to quiet slaps, hissed insults and one broken saucer.

On Sunday mornings the girls always climbed in our bed. Don lit a fire in the bedroom fire-place and we took turns going downstairs and getting coffee and the Sunday papers. After we had read the papers, Anne and I got up and cooked a big Sunday breakfast and Joan and Don gathered firewood.

On Sunday afternoons we took walks, wrote and acted plays, popped corn, made fudge, sang, read aloud, helped with homework, cleared land, fed the deer and played with the kittens. In spite of my occasional misgivings, we were a very happy, enthusiastic family and I was delighted that Anne and Joan had accepted Don so easily, as my husband and their friend.

Then Satan, in the form of adolescence, entered the Garden of Eden and turned it overnight into a jungle. A jungle filled with half-grown, always hungry, emotional, boisterous animals.

The first manifestation was the hair. Anne had bright copper-coloured curly hair which she wore shining clean and shoulder length. Joan had pale blonde curly hair which she wore shining clean, if I caught her, and shoulder length. One early evening Anne began rolling her pretty hair into small wet snails, secured tightly with hair-clips criss-crossed like swords.

I said, "What are you doing to your hair?"

Sighing heavily she said, through a mouth filled with hair-clips, "Oh, you wouldn't understand."

"Your hair looks lovely the way it is," I said unwisely.

Anne began to cry. "I knew you'd get furious if I tried to do my hair the way *everybody* is wearing it."

Joan said, "That's right, Mommy, *everybody* puts their hair up in pin curls. They all think we look like hags."

"I'm not furious," I said, getting a little furious. "But I don't see much point in curling curly hair."

"You just *want* me to look ugly."

From then on Anne and Joan and all their little female friends spent at least one-third of their lives rolling their hair into snail curls. Over the snails they tied bandannas. The strange thing was that, except for special occasions such as the Friday-night dances, we seldom saw these curls unfurled. Their hair was pinned up when they left for school; it was pinned up again the minute they got home.

To be sure they weren't missing any new vital beauty aid, Anne and Joan began to study *Glamour*, *Mademoiselle*, *Charm*, *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, as well as all the film magazines. They knew instantly if Burnt Sugar was the latest colour in lipstick and they pled and bled until they

got it. Then they wore it out in about two hours because they put on a new complete make-up when they got home from school (this one was for getting wood), another for eating dinner, and of course another before doing the dishes because "somebody might come over."

One night they both came in to kiss us good-night coated entirely with some white stuff that smelt like creosote and made them look like plaster casts. I said mildly, "Are you sure that is good for your skin?"

Anne said bitterly, "If it's deadly poison it's better than going to school with spots on my face."

Joan said, "And look at me. My pores are so enormous I look like a cribbage board."

Don said, "What have you got on your hair?"

"Straightener," Joan said. "It's corny to have curly hair."

Then there were the clothes. So very important. Everything long and loose and pitiful. Boys' coats. Men's sweaters. Don's shirts. Boys' jeans. Wooden shoes, casuals, dirty brown and white shoes. Exactly the right kind of white socks turned down an exact number of inches. Yet no matter what I bought Anne and Joan the grass was always greener in somebody else's wardrobe. They and their schoolmates exchanged clothes constantly. It was hard for me to understand this because all the skirts, blouses, sweaters and coats were exactly alike.

Anne and Joan and their friends talked a great deal about sophistication, but when boys appeared they screamed like gulls, laughed like hyenas and pushed one another and the boys rudely. The thing that troubled me the most was that none of Anne and Joan's friends were as rude as they were. They all said please and thank you and stood up when I came into the room. I wondered what magic their mothers used.

Then one day Don and I were at a cocktail party and a strange man came up to us and said, "So you're the parents of Anne and Joan. They go ski-ing with us quite often, you know, and Mrs. Alexander and I think they are the *most charming girls* we have ever met. They are very witty and bright but it is their *manners*, that impress us the most. You see, Carol (I realized suddenly this was the father of exquisitely mannered Carol, who had been in our house off and on, mostly on, for over a year), ever since she entered adolescence, has been behaving like Al Capone."

Of course we told him how beautifully Carol behaved at our house. He said, "I can't keep this to myself," and rushed off and got Mrs. Alexander, and we went over the whole thing again. We all left the party looking years and years younger.

As THE GIRLS grew older, they began to take outside jobs, including baby-sitting. I remember one time they spent a whole week-end on a job and we dropped in on Sunday to see what time they wanted us to pick them up.

I had a nice feeling of pride as I ran up the steps of the house. "Anne and Joan solicited this baby-sitting job all by themselves," I told Don. "And I think it shows encouraging signs of maturity for them to take care of two little children and stay in a house all by themselves from Friday afternoon to Sunday night."

"We'll probably get a blast from Jim and Mary when they get the grocery bill," Don said.

I rang the door-bell. There was no answer, but I thought I detected giggling and scuffling from somewhere in the house. Then Anne came to the door, wearing a tea towel tied low over her forehead like an Arab's head-dress. She was flushed and nervous. "How come you're so early?" she asked, barring the door.

"We came to see how you are getting along."

"We're getting along fine," Anne said, trying to shut the door.

"Where's Joanie?" I asked.

"Oh, she's about," Anne said evasively.

"What do you mean," I said, moving her out of the way and going into the house. "Joanie," I called loudly. "Where are you?"

"I'm all right," answered a muffled voice.

"You'd better not yell," Anne said. "The baby's asleep. Come out in the kitchen and I'll make you a cup of coffee."

Patty, the Morrisons' four-year-old, came down the stairs slowly, one step at a time, and settled herself at the kitchen table with crayons and a colouring book. Carefully choosing a white crayon she announced companionably, "This is just the colour Joanie's hair is going to be when she finishes bleaching it!"

"You be quiet," Anne hissed at her. "You promised."

"I promised not to tell about *your* hair," said Patty, whose shoes were on the wrong feet. "I didn't promise about Joan's." I walked over to Anne and jerked the tea towel off her hair. It exploded from under the towel like a deep old-rose chrysanthemum.

"Anne MacDonald," I shrieked. "What have you done?"

She began to cry. "Joan thought her hair would look better platinum so she bought a bottle of triple-strength peroxide and we both tried it and if you think I look awful wait till you see Joan."

Then Joan appeared, pale and trembling. Her head was swathed in a bath towel. I told her the jig was up and jerked off the towel. Her normally ash-blond hair was the bright egg-yolk yellow of road signs.

"We don't know what to do," Anne sobbed. "We can't go to school like this."

"You could have your heads shaved," Don suggested helpfully.

"It's all Joan's fault," Anne said. "She bought the peroxide."

"Only because you didn't have any money," Joan shrieked.

Don and I tiptoed out. The girls were so busy fighting they didn't even notice. When we retrieved them about six, Anne's hair was a pinkish brown and Joan's a yellowish brown. "Don't we look good?" Joan asked cheerfully.

"What did you do?" I asked, taking a closer look at their dusty-rose and ochre heads.

"I went up to the drugstore and bought a bottle of light-brown dye," Joan said proudly. "I dyed Anne's hair and she did mine. Don't we look good?"

OH, WELL, somehow Anne graduated from high school and got a job in the advertising department of a large department store. She didn't seem to dislike Don and me as much as formerly. She still treated us like lepers, but good-old lepers. Her attitude towards Joan was that of a high-caste Hindu forced to associate with an untouchable. Her friends were all models. She went steady with a boy Don referred to as "that sneaky Bradley."

Then Joan was a freshman at college, but coming home quite often because she was "starving to death." College had wrought no appreciable change in anything except her laugh, which was now a bleat

accompanied by a wide-open mouth and tightly squinted eyes. Her best friends all laughed the same way. Don and I thought this very unattractive and one day I tactlessly said so. Joan blew up. "I can't do *anything* right," she said. "You don't like my hair, you don't like my clothes, you don't like my friends." She slammed out of the house.

Stifling a strong unmotherly desire to pick up the refrigerator and hurl it after her, I poured myself a cup of coffee and sat down at the kitchen table.

Where had I failed? Were all adolescents like Anne and Joan? What had happened to our happy home? Who had erected this impenetrable wall between us and our children? It was Saturday and I hadn't vacuumed or thrown out the dead flowers or changed the sheets and I didn't care. All I wanted to do was to throw myself on the floor, beat my heels and scream.

Suddenly I heard a car door slam. I had almost forgotten that Anne and a model friend, Renée, were coming for the week-end. I put the kettle on for a fresh pot of coffee, and went out to meet them. As I kissed her, Anne said, "It's wonderful to be home. It smells so good over here on the island."

"No wonder you rave about this dreamy house," said the model, who had such little hips I didn't know how she was going to sit on them.

Anne said, "I love it here on the island. It gives me a different perspective. The right things are important over here." She smiled at me and then, as we entered the kitchen, said briskly, "Here, you sit down and I'll make some coffee."

I did sit down, with a thump of astonishment.

Anne said, "After we drink our coffee let's put on our jeans."

Renée said, "I didn't bring jeans, honey, I can't get them small enough round the waist, my waist is only nineteen inches, but I brought my leopard-skin slacks. Shall I go and put them on now?"

"Yes, do," Anne said, winking at me. "They sound terribly smart."

After Renée had gone upstairs, Anne said, "I realize that Renée's brain is the size of a proton, but she's really very sweet."

She asked me about Joan and I told her, and even though I was all braced up for the usual "*Why* won't you realize Joan and I are grown up?" it wasn't forthcoming. Instead, Anne said, "Poor Mommy. Never



mind, she'll grow out of it. I did, and nobody was ever such a revolting adolescent."

I think I must have lost consciousness for a moment because, when I came to, Anne and Renée, in her leopard-skin slacks were saying, "Now we've got to do something about your hair." They both had their hair peeled back from their faces and pinned with huge gold clasps. I wore mine in a medium bob with bangs. After surveying me for a while, they decided I should wear it skinned up into a sort of whale spout on top of my head, secured with the red elastic band from a stalk of celery. When they had finished with me and I felt as though my eyebrows were up by my hairline, Anne said, "Now, you look smart." Renée said, "You're a doll, Mrs. MacDonald."

I went and looked in the mirror of the medicine cabinet. I finally decided that the light must be wrong. When I came back to the kitchen, Anne said, "You don't like it, I can tell." She laughed, took off the elastic and combed my hair back into its normal do.

Sunday night, as I kissed Anne good-bye, I realized that her adolescence really was over, that she was an adult. What is more important, I felt I had a new friend. One who was witty, intelligent, loving, beautiful and *liked* me. My serious-eyed little girl was gone as surely as yesterday's rainbow, but I was happy with my new friend.

The following summer Joan got a job as a saleslady in an exclusive dress shop. The bleating laugh was gone, but she began wearing high-style clothes and the haunted look of the bill-ower. However, she was already a tiny bit of fun sometimes and, anyway, Don and I had Anne to help us understand her.

In January Anne was married—but not to "that Sneaky Bradley"—and during the hectic preparations for the wedding Joan suddenly emerged as an easygoing, affectionate, sympathetic adult. Now they are both married and each of them has three babies. They are loving wives, marvellous mothers, divine cooks and excellent housekeepers. Don and I are very proud of them, but, more important, they *like* us. Their husbands like us. We are friends.

Sometimes we are such good friends that I get all six of the babies—the eldest is four—but I love it and after all it is awfully good for my figure.

THOUGH Anne and Joan are grown up and Don and I are in our forties and grandparents six times over, Vashon Island hasn't changed a great deal.

There were two houses to let on this beach this summer, there is talk of a floating bridge to the mainland, the telephone service is a tiny bit better even though we still have fourteen people on our line.

Ordinary living—eating, sleeping, keeping warm—is somewhat easier than it used to be, but still has little in common with urban life. We continue to have summers that can be distinguished from winter only by looking at the calendar.

Life is always a struggle, but on an island you at least have a feeling of having entered into personal, physical combat with it. Today, for instance.

Every once in a while I put on my old beach coat and slog down the path to look at our sea-wall being so mercilessly hammered by the waves, many of them unfairly armed with logs which they use like battering rams. I can't do anything but watch the spray being flung fifty feet into the air and move the picnic table and benches a little farther back from the edge. But if the sea-wall does come through this storm unscathed, and I'm sure it will, I will experience a great feeling of having won another round in our battle with the elements. This is not just a peculiarity of mine. Don has it, too, and I have heard other island-dwellers speak of "bringing her through another winter," as if they had stood in front of their houses and personally defended them from the rain, the logs, the forests and the waves. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why people, even ones who have had their houses pushed into the Sound by slides, remain here on Vashon, to take the same chance again.



Of course, there have been times when I have wondered if we did the right thing in moving to an island. If it was fair to Anne and Joan. If it was fair to me. Once I asked Don and he said:

"Guiding children through adolescence is no joy-ride no matter where you live. At least here on Vashon we had something to take our minds off it. Fun things."

Then I foolishly said, "And how do you think it has been for us? For instance, how do you think I compare to other women of my age?"

Giving me a long, fond husbandly look, Don said, "Well, you don't look as tired as you did yesterday."

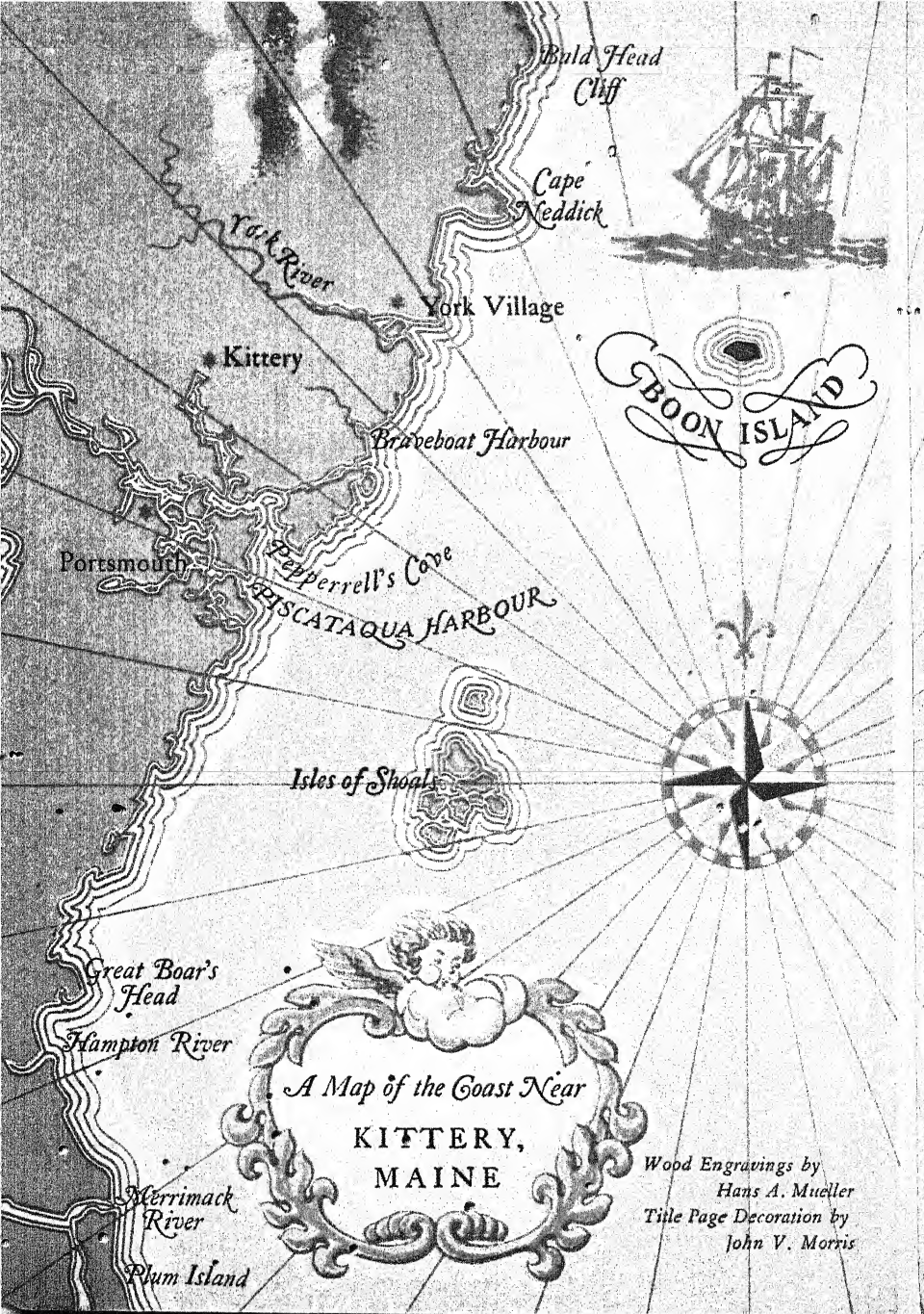
Betty MacDonald



ALMOST any of Betty MacDonald's faithful readers—and they are legion—could tell you that in 1945 she wrote a book about her chicken-farming experiences which became a best-seller overnight (*The Egg and I*). And that she made even a sojourn in a tuberculosis sanatorium extremely funny (*The Plague and I*). And how, after a light-hearted fling at job-hunting and job-losing, her sister Mary prodded her into becoming a writer (*Anybody Can Do Anything*).

It is clearly out of her own bright and eventful life that Betty MacDonald, who died in February 1958 at the age of forty-nine, made her books. She was born Betty Bard in Boulder, Colorado, one of four daughters of a mining engineer. Her early childhood was spent in mining towns from Mexico to Montana. Finally the Bard family settled down in Seattle, where Betty finished growing up. She married at eighteen, and from there on her books take over her life story.

From 1943, Betty and her husband, Don, lived on Vashon Island in Puget Sound (see *Onions in the Stew* for details). There they kept open house for their large family, including six grandchildren.



Bald Head  
Cliff

Cape  
Neddick

York Village

Kittery

Brimboat Harbour

Portsmouth

Pepperrell's Cove

PISCATAQUA HARBOUR

Isles of Shoals

Great Boar's  
Head

Hampton River

Merrimack  
River

Plum Island

A Map of the Coast Near

KITTERY,  
MAINE

Wood Engravings by  
Hans A. Mueller  
Title Page Decoration by  
John V. Morris

# BOON ISLAND

*A condensation of  
the book by*

KENNETH ROBERTS



*"Boon Island" is published by Collins, London*

BOON ISLAND today is a hump-backed boulder-strewn ledge that would be hardly perceptible to those who live along the sea-coast of southern Maine if it weren't for the tall lighthouse that rises from it. But in the winter of 1710, when the ship *Nottingham* struck that rock, in the snow and the dark and the freezing cold, there was no lighthouse on Boon Island. There was nothing but the rock and the seaweed, and off shore, raising their heads in curiosity above the crests of the roaring breakers, a few seals.

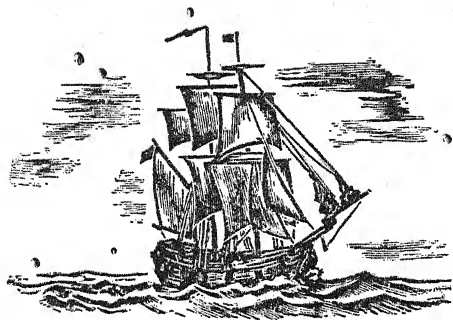
For years Kenneth Roberts wanted to tell the tremendous story of the wreck of the *Nottingham* on Boon Island. Now at last he has done so, in a novel of remarkable power. Only a great writer could take the reader from the gaiety and charm of eighteenth-century England to the crashing climax of the shipwreck and the succeeding drama of despair, courage and final triumph.

*Boon Island*, a major novel by one of the world's most respected authors, is a memorable affirmation of the indomitable spirit of man.

"A tale as powerful and stirring as *North-west Passage* . . . excitingly told by a master of narrative."—*Yorkshire Evening Post*

"Very well told and completely gripping."

—C. V. Wedgwood in *Time and Tide*



**G**REENWICH, for all its faults, was a fascinating place, and I always left it with regret, especially at Trinity Term, to go up to Oxford.

Twice a year I protested to my father that I'd be better off in Greenwich; but he wouldn't have it so. Roughly speaking, our wranglings went round and round, like moles in their devious underground wanderings; but, after the fashion of mole-holes, they seemed to arrive nowhere.

The sum of all my contentions was that an Oxford education, so called because of the strange professors, dons, fellows and tutors to whom we were exposed, was a waste of time, if not downright dangerous. My father, however, insisted that, no matter how much of a drunken sot a don or a tutor might be, education somehow worthy was bound to be achieved by my mere presence within the stone walls of my college, which was Christ Church.

"Look here, Miles," my father would say, "you defeat your own arguments against Oxford without realizing what you're doing. You want to study the writing of plays, and you complain that you're not allowed to do it, so Oxford is a bore and a waste of time. But you *do* do it! You belong to that Buskin Club of yours!

"You say your tutors are profligate, insipid asses—and you've learned it by yourself! That's a whole lot better than believing some professor who tells you that a knowledge of chemistry is an elegant and desirable



accomplishment because it was revealed to Adam by Heaven! Pish! Nobody's educated by that sort of teaching! All anybody learns in college is how to make a start at educating himself: to change his mind if his mind needs changing."

He was right, of course. If I'd never numbed my feet and fingers and nose in the cubicles of the Bodleian, reading the humourless comedies of a score of imitation Shakespeares, I'd never have struck up a friendship with Neal Butler. Whether that was a good thing or a bad thing, I can't say, because it's possible that something worse than Boon Island might have happened to me.

That's what I hope those who read this book will bear in mind: no matter what dreadful thing a man may encounter, he might, but for the grace of God, be overwhelmed by something even more awful. I can't endure people who complain about this or that little thing; but I only reached that state of mind by sad experience.

IN THAT memorable summer of 1710 I looked forward to nothing but returning in June to Greenwich—to its life and its bustle, its palaces and taverns and parks, its endless traffic on the Thames. Within an hour after my father had welcomed me home, I had pushed my dinghy out on the river and was being foully cursed by a hundred rivermen.

A failing wind and the incoming tide carried me to Deptford Steps, where the river makes its great bend to the south—the bend that holds, as in a bag, the palaces and the Naval Hospital and all the taverns so famous for their whitebait dinners.

Even before the dinghy had touched the stone, a boy reached out for her bow, turned her sideways and drew her to the bottom step. This takes strength, and it surprised me, for at first sight the boy didn't look overly strong; but when I climbed from the dinghy and we lifted her from the water to set her on the step, he made it seem as easy as lifting out a broomstick.

The boy was one of the thousands of fisherfolk who concentrated in whitebait season between Ballast Quay and Billingsgate—the stretch of river where the incoming tide pushes whitebait by the millions against the abutments of the Naval Hospital. Sailors, girls, gipsies, dock-workers—every one had some sort of whitebait basket-trap, and was lowering it



into the brown waters of the Thames and flipping it out again, so that the whole waterfront was a flurry of splashing spray.

If I seem to talk overmuch of Greenwich whitebait, it's because those insignificant minnows, in season, were Greenwich's most important product. People came from miles around, especially from London, to dine on them. Nobody ate mutton in Greenwich during the whitebait season, nor fowl, nor beef—not if he could get whitebait.

WHEN the boy went back to his fishing-station, I saw that he had been fortunate; for on a square of wet sacking close behind him were perhaps two-thirds of a bushel of whitebait, a good part of them still flopping and shimmering; so as a reward to him for helping me, as well as a home-coming gift for my father, I thought to buy some at a generous price. I touched his arm to get his attention. To my amazement he shied away from my outstretched hand, as a puppy might shrink from a threatening foot, and the look he darted at me was almost violent in its wariness. Then, in a moment, he was merely a polite boy again, snapping his trap from the river, bringing with it a score of wriggling, glittering minnows.

"Spare me a few whitebait," I said, "two shillings' worth, perhaps?" But the boy only concentrated silently on the submerging of his little trap.

Not wishing to embarrass him by too much talk, I told him to bring all he could to my father's house in Church Lane. "If you have difficulty in finding the house," I said, "ask for Magistrate Whitworth. I'm Miles Whitworth."

"I can't, sir," he said. "I'm fishing for Mr. Langman."

"Nonsense!" I said. "I'll pay you two shillings for a quart, and I'll bet your Mr. Langman, whoever he is, doesn't do as well."

"No, sir," he said. "Mr. Langman pays a shilling for four quarts, but I made a contract with Mr. Langman. I catch whitebait for him on the days I don't work for Mr. Penkethman."

"Penkethman!" I cried. "Penkethman of the Haymarket? The actor-manager?"

The boy gave me a look of approval. "Comedian, sir," he said. "He moved his players here this month."

"Don't tell me," I said, "that you're an actor! Not at *your* age."

"Well, sir," the boy said, "I'm not exactly an actor, but Mr. Penkethman prints my name on the bills—Neal Butler. I'm only the prompter's call-boy; but my father taught me how to write, so I write out the actors' parts as well. Whatever I write, I remember; I'm a quick study."

"How old are you, Neal?" I asked.

"Mr. Penkethman said I wasn't to tell my age," the boy said. "When I play female parts, he says it helps him with the rakes if we leave 'em guessing."

"Rakes?" I said. "Female parts? You play female parts?"

"Oh, yes, sir," the boy said. He twitched his trap from the water, swung it deftly within hand's reach, spilt another shower of whitebait into his burlap container. "I'm a quick study," he proudly repeated. "Once Mr. Penkethman let me recite Mr. Cibber's epilogue about the Italian singers, and when I'm better at Italian, he'll let me do it again."

Female parts! A quick study! Mr. Cibber! This boy, only a little more than half my age, was a real actor, even though his modesty prevented him from saying so. "You're learning Italian?" I asked.

"Oh, no, sir, just something that sounds like Italian." He placed his free hand on his breast, regarded me with candid wide eyes, and from his lips there gushed a stream of foreign syllables among which English words were dropped disconcertingly. The whole effect was foreign, but falsely foreign: the words seemed to have meaning; yet they meant nothing, and were merely excruciatingly droll, especially when, as if emphasizing his flood of nonsense, he hauled up violently on his fish trap to find it brimming with whitebait. As he swung it sideways, one of the four cords broke: the basket slipped, and all his minnows spilt back into the brown Thames water.

"Stap my vitals!" Neal cried. He dropped his broken trap beside him on the stone steps, and suddenly and surprisingly he held in his hand a long, thin-bladed knife, with which he went at the broken cord, trimming and splicing it as neatly as any bos'n on the river.

"Where'd you get that knife?" I asked. I held out my hand for it, but the boy made a quick movement and the knife vanished.

"It belonged to my father," he said. "My father says even big men'll shy away from a knife."

His reference to big men floored me, but somehow the mention of his father made his possession of that long thin knife seem excusable, if not exactly reasonable; so I forgot the knife and sat there beside him on the steps of Ballast Quay with the cool scent of the sea drifting past us. Greenwich, the life of the river and particularly the life of the theatre, concerning which Neal Butler spoke so familiarly, was heaven to me.

Neal's father, he told me, had once been a strolling player. Then, when Neal's mother died, his father joined the Navy. After he had been wounded in an engagement, he was admitted to the Naval Hospital, where his scanty allowance barely enabled him to buy tobacco for himself and supply Neal with a weekly two shillings on which to live in a room in Fisher's Alley. Thus, Neal said, he counted himself fortunate to receive seven shillings a week from Mr. Penkethman, even though that pay was three weeks in arrears.

When the tide was wrong, so that the fops and rakes couldn't sail down from London to Greenwich and sail back again to London the same night, the theatre was closed and he was free to fish for Mr. Langman. On theatre days he fished for himself and turned over his catch to Mr. Penkethman's players, who repaid him by teaching him how to walk and enunciate and have stage manners.

There was something about the way he said the words "fops" and "rakes" that made me wonder what he or his father had endured at their hands; but when I asked him that question, he said abruptly that the whitebait had stopped running. Would I, he asked me, take him as far as Watling Stairs? When I said Yes, he neatly slid the dinghy off the step without any help from me.

I saw Neal meet Langman—a swarthy tall man with a dubious half-smile on one side of his mouth; and I never dreamed, as I watched him empty Neal's little bag of fish into a larger sack and give him a few coins from a leather wallet, that I'd ever see that troublesome man again.

THAT NIGHT, when I guardedly spoke about Penkethman and Neal Butler, my father said, "Actors! Pah!" and immediately used the very words that Neal himself had used, "Fops and rakes!"

"This boy isn't a fop or a rake," I protested. "If I had a brother, I'd be proud if he were like Neal Butler, and so would you, unless I'm greatly mistaken. There's something about him—something that makes you sure he'd be good at anything to which he turned his hand. I think he might become a great actor."

My father pulled off his tie-wig to rub his short grey hair with an impatient hand. "I've no objection to buying this boy's whitebait—have 'em every day for a week if you'd like; but don't for God's sake talk to me about the child's being an actor—they're punks, all of 'em. Punks, my boy!"

He cogitated for a moment. "Well, not all of 'em exactly. I saw Betterton as Falstaff once, and damn near died laughing!"

THE FOLLOWING afternoon, Neal was where I'd first seen him, and on the step above him, in the blue-sleeved summer waistcoat and blue yarn socks of a pensioner of the Naval Hospital, was a lop-sided man with a long yellow moustache and clumps of yellow fuzz protruding so far below the round, flat-topped black hat that they covered his ears. His look of being overloaded on one side was due to the way he carried his right shoulder somewhat lower than his left, as if he were about to reach down with his right hand and haul up an anchor.

Neal gave me that quick smile of his, but before he could speak, the lop-sided man leaned forward, to look at me with an almost fierce intensity.

"You must be Mr. Butler," I said.

"Swede, not 'mister,'" the yellow-haired man said. "Swede Butler. They called me Swede because of my hair."

"I'm Miles Whitworth," I said.

"Aye," Swede said. "Neal tells me your father's a magistrate. He tells me you're a member of Christ Church. I only want to know who my boy takes up with." Again he stared hard at me. "He says he thinks you're an actor."

"That's putting it too strongly, Swede," I said. "We have a club at Christ Church—the Buskin Club. We read plays, and once or twice we've staged one in the Hall; but I hope to write 'em rather than recite 'em."

"Good!" Swede said. "You need fish to fry and I need the advice of someone who isn't an actor. Do you suppose your father would trade a bit of advice for some of Neal's whitebait?"

"I'm sure he would," I said. "He'll take to Neal just as quickly as I did."

Swede put a big hand on his son's shoulder. "Pick up your fishes, boy. We'll go and see Mr. Whitworth. Perhaps he can work out a future for you—one that won't leave you rolling in a gutter or living like a beggar in a naval hospital."

JOHN DEAN was an old friend of my family, a sea captain from Twickenham, a little up-river from London. He loaded and unloaded his cargoes at Greenwich, and always came to our house, before starting on a cruise, to have vessel and cargo insured. My father thought highly of him, and frequently ventured a moderate sum, which Dean would invest in coffee or tea or spices, thus providing education money to be used by me at Oxford.

My father and Captain Dean were sitting in the walled arbour behind our house when I brought Neal and Swede Butler home with me.

"Unless I'm mistaken," my father said to Captain Dean, "Miles has found us some whitebait, and we'll have it for supper, with pickle sauce. You'll get no dish to touch it on your *Nottingham* galley nor in any tavern, for that matter."

Dean, a large calm man, smiled at us, and settled back comfortably in his chair. "Whitebait!" he exclaimed. "I'd run a mile a day for a platterful, but I've got a mate who cheats fisherboys out of nearly all they can net—makes a small fortune selling it to taverns for ten times what he pays for it—so there's never any left over for me. Yes, I'll stay with pleasure, Charles, and you ought to put your chopped pickle in sour cream if you want a proper sauce."

I shook hands with Captain Dean, and my father got up to look at Neal Butler, who made him the politest of bows and held out his poke of whitebait-filled sacking.

When my father fumbled in his pocket, Swede Butler stepped forward and touched his hat. "Sir," he said, "my boy and I ask you to accept it in place of a fee."



"This is Swede, Neal's father," I explained. "He asked me whether you'd trade him some advice for Neal in return for Neal's catch. I told him you would."

"You did, did you?" my father asked. "That's the value you put on my advice, is it? A sack of minnows?"

"No," I said. "I thought you might earn two people's affection, and some entertainment as well—if Neal recites his Italian epilogue for you. That's fairly good pay."

My father put his hand on Neal's shoulder. "I'll accept your white-bait with pleasure," he said. "I'll ask you to take it to the kitchen and give it to Mrs. Buddage. She's our cook. She'll rinse your piece of sacking, so that you can have it to use again. Oh, and could you remember to tell her that Captain Dean says to make the sauce out of chopped pickle and sour cream?"

"And just a little chopped onion," Captain Dean said.

"Sour cream, chopped pickle, chopped onion," Neal repeated, and somehow he enunciated the words in such a way as to make my mouth water. He marched obediently towards the kitchen, and even his manner of walking was a pleasure to the eye.

"Quite a boy," my father said.

"Yes, sir," Swede said. "He may get it from his mother. She'd have been a player herself if a gallery hadn't fallen on her when we were playing the Angel Inn. I couldn't bring up a baby, Mr. Whitworth, so I left Neal with his grandpa and grandma and tried the Navy. Got to be captain of the foretop on the *Minerva* till a French musket ball caught me in the shoulder and qualified me for the hospital."

"What's your problem, Mr. Butler?" my father asked.

"Well, sir, here it is," Swede said. "If I could be in the theatre with the boy, I wouldn't mind so much; but Neal's going it alone, and I know the end of it for him—work a fifth of the year, and never save a penny: get spoiled by the women and the men, too, and wind up in rags or drudging for some rat like Langman."

Captain Dean leaned forward. "What's that about Langman?"

"Oh," Swede said, "he's a mate on one of these merchant vessels. He weaves nets for boys to catch whitebait. Then he collects 'em and sells 'em: makes a good thing out of it."



"Why, that's my mate," Captain Dean said. "That's Christopher Langman!" To my father he explained, "He beats anything I ever saw! Every minute of the day he's working out how to make money, and he doesn't care how he does it."

"Sounds caddish to me," my father said carelessly. "Why don't you get rid of him?"

"The truth is," Captain Dean said hesitantly, "I can't."

"Since when," my father asked, "has a captain been unable to get rid of a mate when his vessel's in port? How does it happen you can't get rid of Langman, John?"

"Well," Captain Dean said, "it's a long story. Langman sailed on one of Woodes Rogers's ships two years ago."

"Woodes Rogers! Why, he's a buccaneer," my father said quickly.

"No, no," Dean said. "Not a buccaneer, Charles! He's a privateer! Privateers carry government commissions, and a tenth of their takings go to the state."

"Oh, don't try to tell me the law," my father said. "I know what the law is, and most of these privateers are nothing but buccaneers, no matter what the law says."

"Well, I don't know about that," Captain Dean said, "but I do know that Langman says he sailed with Woodes Rogers. Round the Gulf of Guayaquil, when Rogers was busy capturing some footling town or other, Langman went off in a small boat with a few of his seamen, came across a smart-looking galley and captured her. Then somehow he was separated from Rogers, couldn't find him again, and decided the safest thing he could do was sail home. He had no money, and his men hadn't been paid, so he hunted up my brother Jasper and offered to sell him the galley at a bargain, provided he was retained as first mate."

He stirred uneasily beneath my father's scrutiny.

"Sounds fishy to me," my father said. "What happened to the crew that was in the vessel when she was taken?"

"I asked him that, and he said they just went ashore, all but two men that he persuaded Jasper to hire."

My father snorted, raised incredulous eyes to the sky; then spoke to Neal. "What did Mrs. Buddage say, young man?"

"She said Captain Dean came here just in the nick of time. She said

she'd just been thinking of making some cheese out of her sour cream." He sounded exactly like Mrs. Buddage.

"Good," my father said, "good. Now, Neal, this Langman: did you undertake to work for him for a certain length of time?"

"Yes, sir," Neal said, "I promised, when he gave me the trap, to fish for him every day when I had nothing else to do. He pays me threepence a quart."

"You know that's not a fair price?" my father asked.

"Yes, sir," Neal said. "If I had time to peddle 'em around, I could get more; but if I took the time to peddle them, I wouldn't be able to catch enough."

"Yes," my father said, "there's something in what you say, but I'm a magistrate and I herewith declare your contract with Mr. Langman to be null and void. I'll pay you a shilling a quart for them, and guarantee to dispose of all you catch. As for Langman, I'll give him a talking-to. He sounds to me like a slippery customer." My father turned to Swede. "Now, Swede," he said, "does it make you easier in your mind to know your boy's having no further dealings with Langman?"

"Yes, sir," Swede said, "that'll help, but I'd like to get him out of the theatre. He's too young, Mr. Whitworth. He thinks these actors are angels right out of heaven. He can already walk like 'em and talk like 'em, and the only thing he doesn't yet do, thank God, is *think* like 'em."

"It's understandable," I told my father. "There's something about the theatre that's mighty exciting."

"It can be mighty destructive, too," my father said. "What are the plays all about? Whoring, drinking, gaming!" He turned to Neal. "See here, my boy: Miles tells me you recited one of Mr. Cibber's epilogues. Will you do it for us now?"

Neal said quickly that he would, but that he'd like a costume. My father went into the house and called to Mrs. Buddage to bring him a shawl and a soiled tablecloth. How Neal wrapped those two pieces of cloth so deftly about him, I couldn't see, but he turned in a moment from a young boy to a girl, wide-eyed, pleading, provocative, looking at us over his shoulder as he spoke. There was something overwhelmingly ludicrous about his meaningless twaddle, delivered with coy

gestures in quarter English, quarter Latin and half imitation Italian. My father snorted and Captain Dean said, "Haw!" but Neal seemed not to hear them.

When it came to an end, Swede was the only one who didn't laugh.

"I think I see what you mean," my father said to Swede. "It isn't easy to divert a talent like that. If I were you—if Neal were a few years older—I'd even advise you not to try, but as I say, I think I know exactly how you feel."

He seemed to think aloud. "Now suppose Neal had a profession to support him. I might be able to use Neal when Miles goes up to Oxford. He'd be a help to me writing briefs—writing insurance. What would you say to that, Swede?"

"I'd be for ever in your debt, Mr. Whitworth."

"If you've been uneasy in your mind," my father said, "you'll probably feel better. All of us can keep an eye on Neal till it's time for him to go to work for me in the autumn—and the work he's doing now is training of a sort: teaches him how to seem at ease when he isn't."

When Swede looked dubious, my father seized his hand and shook it, tapped Neal lightly on the shoulder, and said, "See them to the door, Miles."

Captain Dean got to his feet. "Just a moment," he said. "I've been thinking about that mate of mine, and about Swede's experience on the *Minerva*. How do you spend your days in the Naval Hospital, Swede?"

Swede laughed. "I spend 'em in the hardest kind of work, Captain. Doing nothing."

"How'd you like to ship with me on the *Nottingham*?" Captain Dean asked. "I'd sign you on as first lieutenant. We've got ten guns and a gunner who's contrived to blow his eyes full of powder."

Swede looked from Captain Dean to Neal and back again. "Why," he said slowly, "I think it might be all right. I felt like being a pensioner before my shoulder healed, but I don't feel like it any more. It might be a good thing all round if Neal had a first lieutenant as a father instead of a pensioner."

I thought, as I led Neal and his father to the street, how odd it was that, because the tide had thrust my dinghy against Deptford Steps, the lives of two people had been altered—and greatly for the better, I

earnestly hoped. How many people's lives that tide had altered, I couldn't dream. We never know: we never know!

THAT WAS the beginning for my father, as well as for Captain Dean and me, of a course in the most popular of London's plays. For a guinea apiece, the three of us had tickets that entitled us to see twenty-one plays.

If I were an artist, I could have drawn pictures by the score of those play nights in Greenwich: of wherries, barges and galleys unloading the tumultuous, half-drunken pleasure-seekers at King's Head Stairs while the hot July sun was still high enough to make the massed vessels in the river stand out sharply in black and white: of Londoners, both men and women, outside the doors of the innumerable Greenwich taverns, some standing, some sitting at little tables because the taverns were so crowded, each with a dish of whitebait and a tankard of ale before him.

Even the odours and sounds of Greenwich on those play nights were fascinating: the penetrating perfumes of the silk-clad playgoers: the squealing of orange and apple women crying their wares and reminding all hearers that there was nothing like an orange for throwing at actors: the sailors in blue and white striped trousers, their caps made from pieces of stocking: over everything the savoury fragrance of frizzling whitebait.

To me the most memorable of play-night pictures were those of the play-house itself—the catcalling, orange-throwing roisterers in the gallery, the subdued and honourable citizens of Greenwich in the pit, the affected ladies in the boxes above the stage, and the incredible fops grouped on either side of the stage itself, and frequently all across the front of the stage, so that occupants of the pit had difficulty in seeing the movements of the actors.

Some of these fops became well known to us by sight. All of them affected little mannerisms and great ones, too, for that matter. Their wigs without exception were enormous, sometimes tinted in strange blues and reds. Their gestures, as when they tossed back the lace from their wrists, or made play with perfumed handkerchiefs, were airy and womanly.

Sometimes, after the play, my father and Captain Dean and I waited

for Neal and he walked home with us. Probably we would have waited for him, the night of July 29th, if he hadn't been reciting that Italian epilogue of Cibber's. This meant it would take some time for Neal to get out of his full-skirted costume and female make-up. Unfortunately the night was warm and all three of us were eager for a bottle of chilled claret; so home we went.

When we got there, we did something we seldom did—opened our downstairs windows. This was a dangerous practice in Greenwich, as it was in any naval town, because of the almost unbelievable number of thieves, street-walkers, and light-fingered dockyard workers who roamed the streets at all hours of the night, alert to snatch anything from an unguarded room.

We sat there in the semi-dark. Captain Dean was commenting on his *Nottingham* and his forthcoming voyage to America. Behind his talk I was conscious of the night sounds of Greenwich—the bells from the vessels in the river; the rattling of wheels of after-theatre carriages on the cobbles—when suddenly I heard something I didn't like at all. Captain Dean and my father heard it too; for their heads turned slowly and questioningly towards each other. What we heard was half-way between a gasp and a gurgle, as though someone had started to shout, and had been prevented by a gush of liquid in his throat.

I pulled the curtain to one side, leaning from the window to listen. I thought I saw a blob of darkness on our front steps. When I stared at it I decided it was nothing—there was no movement from it—and then, suddenly, I heard a long-drawn, quivering inhalation, such as one might make after holding his breath until his lungs are on the verge of bursting.

I ran to the front door and drew it open.

Neal Butler fell into the hallway as if he had been leaning against the door. I pulled him to his feet. His appearance horrified me.

"What's the matter with you? You look ill!"

My father and Captain Dean were on their feet, staring at us, and Neal's appearance led Captain Dean to hurry to the windows, draw them down and close the shutters. My father struck a light, and helped me put Neal in a chair. His breathing was quick and shallow, with a deep shuddering breath at unexpected intervals.

"What happened to you, Neal?" my father asked. "Speak up! We're your friends."

When Neal didn't answer, my father reached for a claret bottle and filled a glass. "Here," he said, "drink this." When Neal continued to stare into space, my father grasped his chin, and put the glass to his lips. Neal choked; then drew two of those long, shuddering sighs.

"He was waiting for me after the play," he said flatly.

"Who was?" my father asked.

"The one with the white face," Neal said. "The painted one." He was describing one of the fops we had often noticed, and of whom we had spoken. "He pulled at me—pulled at my clothes."

"This man—he'd pulled at you before?" my father asked.

"I had my knife," Neal said. "When we were almost at your house, I ran. He ran after me. When he caught up with me, I showed him the knife. He pushed it away. He—he laughed! That white face! That painted fish mouth! I had to do it. When he fell over against me, I was glad I did it. Then I was afraid."

My father put his hand on Neal's shoulder. "Had the man ever done this before?"

Neal gulped. "No, sir. But the first time I recited Mr. Cibber's epilogue I could hardly get past him in the wings. He squeezed me. I couldn't get round him."

"Listen carefully," my father said. "Do you think others saw him squeeze you, as you put it?"

Neal nodded and swallowed hard.

Captain Dean got to his feet. "Let's see about this," he said. "Charles, you sit here with Neal while Miles and I go out in the street for a few minutes. Neal, you're not to move! Understand?"

Neal nodded.

Captain Dean and I found the fop huddled against a hedge between our house and the park, a crumpled shadow of a man.

"The man's drunk," Captain Dean said loudly. "This is no place for him! You take him under one arm, Miles, and I'll take him by the other. We'll walk him towards the park."

When we pulled him to his feet, his head hung slack on his shoulders. The handle of Neal's knife still protruded from the front of his coat.

"Take out that knife, Miles," Captain Dean whispered. "Toss it into your garden."

We supported the body draggingly towards the park, and it seemed to me that we did it so successfully that anyone who saw us would think we were merely doing a Christian act for a gentleman who had been over-sedulous with the port.

At least, that's what I thought until two men came towards us from the direction of the park. Then I knew that the body was limper than any mere drunken man could be or could look.

As they drew nearer to us, Captain Dean muttered, "Better do some acting!" He took the fop's body round the waist and hung him, doubled up, over his arm; then bent over him solicitously. I bent over too and made retching sounds. His garments smelled abominably of musk.

The two men halted beside us. One said, "Want any help?" I thought I recognized the voice of Lacy Ryan, one of Penkethman's young players.

"No, indeed," Captain Dean said heartily. To the body he said cheerfully, "Try hard! Better out than in." Again I uttered retching sounds and made play with my handkerchief.

The two men went slowly on, laughing; and when they were dim in the darkness, we carried the dead man to a wooded spot and left him there. I was sweating, and with good reason, because I had no way of knowing how much the eyes of a keen young man like Lacy Ryan might have seen.

"WELL," my father said, when we told him what had happened, "there's nothing like an occurrence of this nature to help a man make up his mind. And there's one sure thing about it: we've got to get Miles and Neal Butler out of here before somebody starts asking too many questions."

He looked at Captain Dean. "How long before you'll be ready to sail, John?"

"Two weeks, maybe," Captain Dean said. "Our cordage is at Gravesend, ready to go aboard, but I've done nothing about the butter and cheese I'm taking for a quick turn-over in Portsmouth or Boston—Portsmouth probably."

"Get 'em in Donegal," my father said promptly. "I'll tell you what to do, John: drop down to Gravesend on the early tide tomorrow morning, take on your cordage, then pick up your butter and cheese in Ireland. I'll provide enough money to double your purchases, the profit from my part to be divided between us.

"I make this stipulation, though: Miles must go along as super-cargo. I can't have him mixed up in anything like this, and if Lacy Ryan recognized him he certainly *will* be mixed up in it. And you'll make Neal your apprentice. He's a good boy, John. We can't let him start off in life with a murder charge against him—and that's what it'll look like to most London magistrates, no matter how it looks to us."

Captain Dean nodded thoughtfully. "Why not? It'll let me have decent company aft, in place of Langman. It gives me an excuse to send Langman forward with the men. Your idea's a good one, Charles. You won't make a fortune on the venture, but we ought to clear enough to take on a good load of salt cod-fish in America. It smells, but it's a sure seller in England or France."

"Well, now, look," my father said. "You go on back to the *Nottingham*, John. Go tonight—now! Take Neal with you. Keep him out of Langman's way until you're clear of the land. I hunted out Langman and gave him a talking-to he'll never forget. I doubt that he knows which way is up, as the saying goes, but we can't take chances. He's Malice personified."

He put his hand on Neal's shoulder. "You go along with Captain Dean," my father said, "and try to forget everything that happened to you tonight. Under Captain Dean you'll learn to be a mariner—a credit to your father and to all of us."

THE NEXT morning, when the hospital gates opened at five o'clock, I was there on my father's instructions to pick up Swede. When I told him the *Nottingham* must sail that day, and the reason why, he looked almost relieved. "This is the way I've always wanted it," he said. "A way for Neal and me to be together. Ever since I signed on with Captain Dean, I've been like a fish out of water in this damned hospital, with all the political pensioners that don't know a futtock shroud from a wall-piece. If Neal killed a man, he did it for a good reason. I'd have



done it for him if I could—but he wouldn't talk about such things." He felt his shoulder and seemed pleased. "Damp mornings like this, my shoulder used to ache, but since I signed on with Captain Dean, it's been all right! Yes, sir, I can pull my weight!"

At the house, my father had two seaman's bags ready for us. "Get to the quay as fast as you can—and don't look so glum, Miles. Remember what I told you: a smile is the best ticket to heaven that any man can carry."

He pushed us towards the door, kissed me lightly, and coughed as if to show me he wasn't overly concerned at my departure. "Every young man ought to travel, and any kind of travel is uncomfortable; so you'll be no worse off aboard the *Nottingham* than all the other young Englishmen who run off to France and Italy every summer."

For the life of me I couldn't say a word: I knew how my father felt. I was always low in my mind when I left him to go up to Oxford; but now I was even more unhappy.

As we went down the steps and turned towards the oily, misty river, my father called after us, "Watch over him, Swede, as though he were your own boy." I always remembered his words, and Swede never forgot them either.

WHEN WE came over the *Nottingham's* bulwarks that morning of July 30th, Captain Dean pushed us into the after cabin. "Thank God you're aboard," he said. "That damned Langman! I'll bet your father was right when he suspected him of being a buccaneer!" They had been arguing. The first mate had resented being moved out of the after cabin, and when Captain Dean had told him that he would be subordinate to me as super-cargo and to Swede as first lieutenant, he accused him of breaking the agreement made with Jasper Dean.

But the agreement was intact. Langman would remain first mate, though he would bunk forward with the crew. Nicholas Mellen and George White, the men who had been signed on as part of Langman's agreement, would continue to be members of the crew.

The Captain introduced us to his brother Henry, contenting himself with saying that Henry was travelling for his health, wishful, too, of studying the methods of American merchants. Henry was a smaller

silent copy of the captain, done in weaker colours, and he was an epileptic.

We stowed our dunnage as instructed. Captain Dean put me with Henry Dean in one of three small cabin rooms, Neal Butler in a second room with Swede. The captain bunked by himself in the third and smallest room. Neal had been set to copying some papers: the captain was keeping him out of sight until we were under way. I caught Langman looking at the boy out of the corner of his eye, but he walked widely round Neal, apparently still mindful of my father's dressing-down.

Captain Dean halted me at the top of the companion ladder. "Don't waste a minute," he said. "This Langman is a trouble-maker. That's why I'm so anxious to stow that cordage, and get to sea before he has a chance to go ashore and talk. If he ever hears about that dead man, he'll put two and two together, and he'd be bound to make ten the answer." Therefore I was apprehensive, and Captain Dean was equally fearful; so the two of us worked the men hard at loading the cordage, and I had my first look at the company with whom I was to spend the most important days of my life.

Sailors to me are a mystery, always, and I shall for ever be at a loss as to why men, of their own free will, take to the sea. To my way of thinking a ship is no better than a prison, and those who sail upon her, barring the captain, do so out of desperation or from their inability to make a living on the land.

Our ship's cook, for example, Cooky Sipper, could never have been a cook anywhere except on a merchant vessel, where there's little to eat save salt pork, salt beef and ship's biscuit. As a seaman and a stower of cordage he was useless; and being a fat man, he succeeded at only two things: perspiring easily and getting in everyone's way.

White and Mellen, the two men foisted on us by the agreement between Langman and Jasper Dean, were both bos'ns. A bos'n, because he has charge of all sails, rigging, canvas, colours, anchors, cables and cordage, must of necessity be an able seaman, and White and Mellen certainly were able. White had a depression at the end of his nose, like the stem end of a peach, and Mellen was so cross-eyed that I didn't see how he could steer a boat.

The carpenter, Chips Bullock, looked a little like his name, for he would stand with head lowered, staring at a task to be done, then rush at it like a bull, pushing and grunting.

The other men in the crew—William Saver, Christopher Gray, Charles Graystock and Harry Hallion—were about the same sort of sailors that every resident of Greenwich was accustomed to see in taverns, or wandering aimlessly along the streets: people who seemed to have come from nowhere and to be bound for nowhere.

Saver had enormous ears and never smiled except when he heard of trouble occurring to someone. He wasn't particular. Anyone would do.

Christopher Gray was a gunner who had lost two fingers and had his eyelids blown full of powder grains. I doubted that he could lay a gun effectively, but I never found out, fortunately.

Graystock was a small man with a drooping lower lip. Whatever he was set to do, he usually left it half done in order to talk to and interfere with someone who was doing well enough without assistance.

Hallion was a reckless sort, always getting hurt because he did things in ways they shouldn't be done. He had a positive genius for doing things wrong, poor wretch.

WHEN, on the morning of August 2nd, the last barge-load of cordage came aboard, every one of the five of us in the *Nottingham's* cabin heaved a sigh of relief. Even before it was lowered into the hold, our anchors were aweigh, and we were headed down-stream for the Nore, that sandy islet at the mouth of the Thames where outbound merchantmen assemble to wait for warships assigned to convoy them out of England's privateer-infested narrow waters and in the general direction of their desired havens.

As we came down among the sixty-odd vessels anchored at the Nore, Captain Dean eyed them disparagingly. "Look at their hulls," he told me. "Hardly a galley among 'em: bluff bows, like tubs. If we get many like that in our convoy, we'll have to strike out on our own."

"If you strike out on your own," Langman warned, "this ship'll have another owner in a week's time."

"Is that a threat, Mr. Langman?" Captain Dean asked.

Langman's face was a dusky red. "No!" he shouted. "But I took this

ship myself when I was with Woodes Rogers, and I know how easy she is to take! You let a French privateer lay her aboard and where'll *you* be?"

"I'll be awake, Mr. Langman," Captain Dean said. "I think perhaps her crew was asleep when *you* took her."

Langman went forward, seething.

That passage between Langman and Captain Dean was characteristic of their attitudes. Captain Dean's idol, whom he quoted and to whom he referred more frequently than did Langman to Woodes Rogers, was Sir Isaac Newton. Dean had corresponded with Newton regarding an improved method of finding the longitude of a ship at sea; and he admired Newton immeasurably for his invention of the reflecting telescope.

But at any mention of these additions to human knowledge, Langman became almost incoherent with fury.

"Longitude!" he'd sputter. "What do you want of more longitude! All you need is latitude!"

As for Newton's reflecting telescope, he insisted that it was impossible. Nonsense, he called it.

Captain Dean listened to his tirades with a placid face. "Mr. Langman," he said, "I've looked through Sir Isaac Newton's reflecting telescope. By using prisms, he makes it possible to see things that you couldn't see at all through an ordinary telescope."

"Prisms!" Langman snorted. "There's no such thing!"

"Seeing is believing," the captain said.

"Like hell it is," Langman said. "I've seen ships sailing upside down! I've seen sun-dogs, with four suns round a central sun! That doesn't mean ships sail upside down, does it, or that there's five suns?" He stalked away, his neck swollen with anger.

"What makes him like that?" I asked Captain Dean.

He shrugged. "Who knows? The world is full of Langmans, condemning things that might help mankind. Newton's shown the world something new and valuable, so the ignorant attack him. The Langmans always refuse to look through the telescope."

"Maybe so," I said, "but if I were captain of this ship, I'd make Langman keep a civil tongue in his head."

He eyed me quizzically. "How, Miles?"

"With a belaying pin, if I had to."

Captain Dean shook his head. "No, Miles. I can't use violence because I don't like violence. I'm afraid of it. I'm strong, and if I hit any man on this ship, I'd put my heart in it, and he might be hurt—or killed. Besides, we're short-handed. A galley should have a crew of twenty-five. We have fourteen, including you and me. I can't risk losing a man for any reason. Don't expect heroics out of me, Miles. I'm just an ordinary individual, who makes mistakes like all the rest of the world, and is mighty glad he doesn't have to be burdened with listening to too many fools."

ON THE seventh of August two sloops of war made signals indicating that they would convoy all merchant vessels wishing to proceed to northern Scotland or northern Ireland, and we soon learned that Captain Dean was right about the sailing qualities of the twelve vessels that moved off to the eastward to cluster round the sloops of war like fat goslings between two proud parent geese. They were slow, and in order to sail as slowly as they did we carried nothing except topsails and headsails.

After five days of this Captain Dean could stand it no longer. "Crowd on the canvas, Mr. Langman," he shouted. "We'll have this convoy hull down by mid-afternoon, and be off the Orkneys tomorrow, sure as shooting."

Langman protested. "The men won't like it."

"You mean Mellen and White won't like it," the captain said. "They won't if you tell them not to, so don't tell 'em!"

That was the beginning of an oft-renewed argument between Langman and Captain Dean—an argument that came to one of its many heads when we were short of the Isle of Aran by just a few miles and the look-out sighted two vessels in a bay near its tip. As soon as Langman heard the word, he went half-way up the mizzen ratlins to see for himself: then called down to Mellen and White.

"Privateers," he bawled. He came down the ratlins like a squirrel and ran to the quarter-deck. "Those are privateers," he told the captain. "All the men say so."

"What do the men know about it?" Captain Dean asked. "Donegal Bay is full of British naval vessels and fishermen. This is no place for French privateers."

"I say they're privateers," Langman said. "I can tell by the cut of their jibs."

A voice reached us from the waist. "He wants us to be captured."

"Hear that?" Langman demanded. "That's what they're all saying: you want to be captured by a privateer."

"That's the silliest thing I ever heard," Captain Dean said. "This ship cost money, as you well know. So did the cordage we're carrying. Why in God's name would I want to be captured by a Frenchman?"

Langman was supercilious. "You insured the cordage, didn't you?"

"Of course I did," Captain Dean said. "Only a fool would fail to insure his cargo."

Langman persisted. "If you turned the ship over to a privateer, your brother Jasper'd get the insurance money, wouldn't he?"

"Certainly he would," Captain Dean said. "Also, all of us, including me and my brother Harry, would land in a French prison. If I thought I was in danger of being captured, I'd run the ship ashore."

Langman wouldn't stop worrying the subject. "If you *did* run her ashore, both you and your brother would get the money."

Captain Dean turned away from him and took the wheel from Harry Hallion. "Harry," he said, "go forward and tell the men we're running between Aran and the main, and that we'll neither abandon this ship nor let any Frenchman have her."

Hallion went forward and spoke to White and Mellen. At his words both of them burst into derisive laughter.

"This has gone far enough," Captain Dean said. "Take the wheel, Miles! Keep her steady as she goes."

He ran from the quarter-deck to the waist, stopping in front of Mellen and White, who stared sullenly at their feet. "What are you damned fools preaching to these men?" he demanded.

Mellen gave him a sullen answer. "We're not preaching anything. We just don't propose to be turned over to the French."

"Do you know what you're saying?" Captain Dean said. "You're implying I'm a traitor."

When neither Mellen nor White answered, Captain Dean's two big hands shot out, seized them by the collars of their jackets and banged their heads together so that the sound came clearly to us on the quarter-deck. "I'll have common sense on this ship, and not a lot of buccaneery blethering."

He threw them between two of the guns.

Both White and Mellen were able to get to their feet. The cracking together of their heads had been no more violent than the caning a schoolmaster gives a boy for writing verses on the wall of a privy. If the captain had treated them with the violence their conduct deserved, their skulls would have been cracked like plovers' eggs.

THE CAPTAIN had been right all the time, for the two ships paid no attention to us.

By nightfall we were safely anchored in the snug harbour of Killybegs, which was surrounded by the greenest hills I ever hope to see. On the slopes of all the hills were black and white cattle on whose milk and cream and butter, which even Cooky Sipper couldn't spoil, we lived in luxury.

We lay in the harbour of Killybegs for six weeks, waiting for cool weather before loading a thousand firkins of butter and the three hundred cheeses which Captain Dean proposed to sell to the citizens of Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Portsmouth people, Captain Dean claimed, were the best people in the world—the most hospitable, the most generous, the most appreciative, of any people in America—and he'd run no risk of offering them rancid butter.

For the first time since that terrible twenty-ninth of July, Neal Butler's smile came back to him in the calmness and remoteness of that pretty harbour of Killybegs. Perhaps the prospect of America helped him to forget.

Captain Dean set him to drawing the coastline of America from a worn Mercator's projection, starting with Cape Sable in Nova Scotia and working as far south as New York. When he wasn't at this task he was helping Swede scale the guns, or learning the care and the use of a plane and an adze from Chips Bullock.

He was himself again except for just one thing. He wouldn't talk

about the theatre or anything that had happened to him during his life in Greenwich.

THE LAST of sixty thousand pounds of the best Donegal butter, all packed in firkins, and three hundred Donegal cheeses had come aboard when we set sail on September 25th on a voyage that for devilishness was enough to make me wonder again why any man went to sea of his own free will.

During all the time the *Nottingham* sailed the great circle, we saw nothing but mountainous waves—ran into winds so contrary that we spent more time blundering backward than we did wallowing forward. Our water-casks sprang leaks so that we had to go on short rations: our beef turned sour.

October was a villainous cold month: November was worse: and in December the sun apparently disappeared for good in a gurry of fog and dirty grey clouds.

On Monday, December 4th, we caught a glimpse of Cape Sable in Nova Scotia.

Then the weather turned dirtier than ever.

"We could make Portsmouth in a day," Captain Dean told us, "but I've got to see the sun just once before I take any chances."

So we stood off and on, and a week passed. The wind was frigid and bitter and the waves dirty and grey, as if they'd dredged up sand and seaweed from the ocean bottom.

I well remember that Monday morning when we finally caught sight of the sun. Usually a glimpse of it after a north-east blow, Captain Dean said, meant that we'd have a little decent weather. Instead of that, the sun stayed out just long enough for us to stand in towards the land and sight the long, low coastline of New England, with tree-covered points thrust out towards us, and all the ledges and hills covered with snow.

Captain Dean was elated. "That's Cape Porpoise," he said. "Now I know exactly where we are. We'll head due south, and we'll be in Portsmouth tomorrow morning."

He'd no sooner spoken than the sun disappeared again behind a driving wall of snow.



*December 11th, Monday*

I REMEMBER that day for other things. Our food, bad to begin with, had become steadily worse; and on that morning of December 11th there was none at all. Cooky Sipper, Langman told the captain, was ill, and none of the other men knew how to cook. So Swede volunteered to do the cooking until we reached Portsmouth; and when he went to the galley, Neal went with him to help.

We wallowed creakingly south, until nightfall, when the captain turned over the deck to Mr. Langman. The cabin felt empty without Swede and Neal, and after supper I climbed on deck to go forward to the cook-house. The quarter-deck, except for the helmsman, was empty; I found Langman braced in the doorway of the galley. Inside, the dim lamp swinging in its gimbals cast a flickering light on Swede and Neal, both staring at Langman. When, to steady myself, I caught hold of the door-post beside Langman, he opened his mouth, then shut it again, turned, and worked his way back to the quarter-deck.

"Miles," Swede said, "something smells round here, and it's not the cheese. Langman's been in the hold after extra meat for White and Mellen. He also wants to head straight out to sea."

I couldn't believe my ears. "Straight out to sea! What for, for God's sake! We're running south-west before a north-easter. If we turn at right angles, we'll be in the trough and on our beam-ends before you can say Scat!"

"Tell him what you heard, Neal," Swede said.

"It was when he gave Mellen the meat," Neal said. "He said, 'If we don't wait for this blow to let up, we'll be in Portsmouth tomorrow.' Then he said, 'Tell 'em I'll get 'em more water too.'"

"That's what Neal heard," Swede said. "There's no two ways about it. Langman wants this ship for himself. He wants to put straight out to sea and wait for a fair wind and blue skies that would make it safe for him to take her over. If he doesn't, we'll be in Portsmouth, and he'll have lost his chance."

I stared at him. "And the extra meat and the extra water would be bribes to get the others to side with him."

"What else?" Swede asked.

I told Swede to get back to the cabin with Neal as quickly as he could. I went behind them; when I reached the quarter-deck, I could just make out Langman in the snowy dark.

"I didn't see a look-out up forward," I told him.

"Look-out! What's the good of a look-out on a night like this?" I could sense the contempt on his swarthy thin face.

In the snug cabin Captain Dean had his coat off, readying himself for bed; but when I followed Neal and Swede through the door and started telling him what they had told me, he reached behind him for his coat, caught up the iron loggerhead from its rack beside the cabin stove; and we went out again into the whirling snowflakes.

LANGMAN wasn't on the quarter-deck. Captain Dean spoke to the helmsman. "Where's the mate?"

Gray, the helmsman, said, "He went forward, Captain."

"He went to the hold," Swede said.

The door to the hold swung open and Langman, carrying a lantern in one hand and a water jug in the other, stepped out.

"You're supposed to be on watch, Mr. Langman," Captain Dean said. "Where's your look-out? You have no business in the hold. What are you doing with that water jug? You know everyone on this ship is on a strict water ration!"

"That ain't so," Langman said. "You have all the water you want, and the crew gets half enough. They're sick of you and your ways. They say you're aiming to run this ship ashore, now, tonight! They say you've got to take her straight out to sea if you want to prove you're not aiming to wreck her."

"Wreck her?" Captain Dean shouted. "In a north-easter? At night? In a snowstorm? Are you crazy, Langman?"

"By God," Langman said, "you'll take her out to sea or we'll know the reason why!"

Captain Dean raised his head and seemed to sniff the air. "Swede!" he shouted. "Go forward! Keep your eyes peeled!"

To Langman Captain Dean said, "I'll take no orders from you, Christopher Langman. You stop inciting this crew to rebellion!"

Langman turned contemptuously away, and found himself squarely confronted by Henry Dean, who reached out and took the water jug, almost as though he took a child from its mother's arms. Langman resisted, shouting, "Mellen! White!"

On this Captain Dean stepped forward, raised the loggerhead and brought it down on Langman's skull. Langman dropped to his knees but, unfortunately for all of us, staggered to his feet again and reeled towards the cabin.

We heard Swede shouting something from the bow.

The captain ran forward, sliding precariously on the sloppy planks. Almost immediately he ran back past us to the quarter-deck. "Starboard!" he shouted to the helmsman. "Hard to starboard!"

The deck surged up beneath us. The whole ship lurched and seemed to cough, as a man, coughing, convulses himself. The vessel sickeningly rolled and rose up and up on a monstrous wave. "Get your helm to starboard! Starboard!" Captain Dean screamed.

The enormous comber on which the ship was riding seemed to hurl her forward. She struck with a crash that threw me to the deck—a crash so loud that my brain crackled, and among the splinters was a faint hope that if any man lived within a mile of where we struck, he would be awakened by that dreadful sound and hurry to help us.

THE RUMBLING, roaring thunder of which we seemed to be the centre was the sound of breakers pounding at the unseen rocks on which the *Nottingham* shuddered and grated. Her stern was higher than her bow, as if bent on thrusting her stem more solidly against the shore, and the waist of the ship seemed filled with struggling figures, striving to reach the after cabin.

I found a rope-end to which to cling and ran into Chips Bullock making his way along the weather rail. A breaker, curling over the bulwarks, hit him squarely. It sent him sliding down the steep deck and into a gun carriage. My rope-end let me reach him, take his axe and hammer and pull him to his feet. "My work-bag!" he shouted. "Spikes! Nails!" He fell to his knees, scrabbling in the scuppers. Another wash of icy foam struck us. By the grace of my rope-end we pushed and pulled each other to the cabin companion.

The cabin was like a room insecurely poised on one of its corners. A single lamp still burnt dimly, shuddering in its gimbals. Only Captain Dean was on his feet, supporting himself by the rudder case. The others were on the floor, some trying to rise, only to reel down again: the others just lying there. Cooky Sipper was moaning.

Langman, when we crawled in, was striving to make himself heard by Captain Dean.

"You were bound to do it from the very first!" he was shouting. "You've been looking for a chance to run her ashore since the day we left the convoy!"

"This is no time for such stuff!" Captain Dean shouted back. "I want every man in this cabin to pray."

"Pray?" Langman demanded, and his voice was a squeal. "Nothing can help us, now you've gone and run us ashore!"

Captain Dean smashed his fist against the rudder case. "All right! All right! I put you here! All I know is there was no land on the course I plotted from Cape Porpoise, and there was no look-out forward when you had the deck. Now pray! Pray for the strength to help yourself! Strength!"

The whole ship sagged sickeningly to one side. A splitting sound came from beneath us, and the cabin floor fluttered.

"Oh, God," Captain Dean said, "give each man the strength to stand upon his feet and stretch out a helping hand to every other man. Say it, every single one of you, and mean it! God give me strength! Say it, Langman."

"God give me strength," Langman said.

"Again!" Captain Dean shouted. "Everyone! God give me strength!"

The men's voices quavered thin and bird-like through the sounds of the smashing seas.

The whole after part of the ship straightened a little, then seemed to slide downhill.

"Get on deck," Captain Dean cried. "Get up before she breaks in two, or slides off." He pulled Chips to his feet. "Use your axe! Swede! Miles! Go with him! Cut the weather shrouds and ratlins! If the masts fall towards the land, we may have a chance! If they don't fall, chop the foremast!"

The task of cutting those shrouds and ratlins was difficult beyond belief. We hoisted Chips up on the bulwarks. He thrust a foot through the ratlins, and hooked his other leg round a stay. But when he swung his axe, one of those roaring towering breakers foamed against him and blinded us; when the foam subsided, Chips was in the scuppers, still clinging to his axe. We tried pinning him against the bulwarks with our shoulders; but the slash of icy foam and the driving snow were numbing and he couldn't seem to swing the axe.

"Give me that axe," Swede shouted. "Stand under me. When I fall, catch me if you can."

He pushed the axe handle inside his breeches, caught Neal's shoulder in a quick embrace, bellowed, "We'll be all right"; then went up the inside of the ratlins like a big spider. We lost him at once in the snow and the flying spray, but felt the jarring of his axe against the rigging—and then, suddenly, he came sprawling down among us.

Almost in the same moment the foremast went over the side with a splintering crash. Then the mainmast went, and the ship rolled on her side to surge soggily as if agonized by the pounding of those roaring breakers.

"Look for the axe!" Swede said. "I threw it to leeward when I fell!"

"To hell with the axe," Chips said. "Get ashore! Wherever people live we can find another axe."

Swede went first, Neal followed and I came after. We crawled out along the mast. Ratlins and shrouds were tangled round it. The foretop was like a fence to be climbed, but we climbed it.

The tip of the mast rested against something solid. That something was seaweed, and beneath the seaweed were rocks—solid, immovable rocks.

We were safe, I thought, secure from those bellowing breakers; and even as I write the words "safe" and "secure," I feel a sort of shame for those who, like myself, could let themselves think that there is ever any such thing as safety and security.

The seaweed was so slippery that if a person upon it was unable to see where to step, he staggered, he lurched, his feet went out from under him, pitching him upon his face or, even worse, wrenchingly upon his back. When we put out our hands to break our falls, our



fingers were slashed by the barnacles that covered the rocks against which the foremast truck rested.

Eventually, slipping and feeling our way up that treacherous shore, we came to naked ice-covered rocks on which no seaweed grew. To me that meant we were above high-water mark. Now we were truly safe—or so I once more idiotically thought.

I caught at Swede's wet coat. "Swede," I said, "we'll have to find shelter from this snow and wind." Not only was the snow plastering itself against our faces with a force that numbed us, but the snow was mixed with spindrift, so that it seemed twice as cold as anything could be.

"Go to the left," I told Swede. "I'll go to the right. Chips can walk straight ahead. Let's leave Neal here to shout to us in case we're lost. Hunt for trees or bushes—any kind of shelter. Anything—anything at all."

I DON'T know how long I blundered about in the thick, roaring dark. The tumultuous sea seemed to thunder from every direction. After all this exertion, this terror of pelting snow and flying foam, my mouth and throat were like leather. In desperation, I was chipping ice to suck from one of the boulders, when I heard a thin piping ahead, dim amid all the uproar of the breakers. It might have been a sea bird: it might have been the screaming of one rock, driven by a breaker against another.

I held my breath and listened—and heard it again: a faint call.

I crawled on, feeling for boulders, easing myself to the tops of rocks; skirting ledges; on the brink of one of these ledges I found myself looking down into a black cavity from which, as I balanced there, burst a desperate bellow, a prolonged "Hullooo!"

"I'm Whitworth," I shouted into that black void.

I heard Langman's voice. "Whitworth makes ten. Now shout," Langman said. "One, two, three: Hulloooo!"

I joined in their shout with all my heart and strength, realizing horribly, as I did so, that the faint sound I had heard a few short minutes before had been the concerted bellowing of nine men!

There was a clatter and a cry of pain from the dark hollow.

I heard Captain Dean's voice. "I've got Cooky Sipper! How many's here?"

Langman said, "Twelve with you and Cooky."

Swede's voice came to us, half strangled by the snow and the wind. "I'm thirteen. I've lost my bearings! Where's the boy?"

"Thank God," the captain said. "The boy's back there a rod and a half. He said Whitworth told him to stay. He wouldn't come along with me."

"I know where Neal is," I said. "I'll get him."

When I reached him he sank to his knees and huddled down into himself. "I haven't moved," he said. I could hardly understand his words, his voice was so shaken with cold. "Did anybody find a house?" he asked. "Place to get warm?"

I didn't have the heart to answer.

"You'll have to crawl, Neal," I said. "The rocks are icy. If you're thirsty you can eat the ice."

He still held Chips's hammer. I took it from him and with it pounded ice from a boulder. It came off in curved slabs about an inch thick. We bit into them as into slices of solid frosted bread.

When we got back we found the men huddled together in an irregular oval between two outcroppings of ledge. The outcroppings were perhaps three feet high—no shelter at all until one rose to his feet and got the full force of the wind, snow and spray in his face.

"Has anybody got anything I can put on my head?" Captain Dean asked. "When I came to get off, the ship had slipped. To get ashore I laid off my coat and wig and had to jump."

Nobody answered. Langman cursed.

"What did you find?" I asked Swede.

"Same as Chips," Swede said. "Nothing. Just rocks and ledge. Then more seaweed."

"I think this is an island," Chips said. "When we get the spring tide——"

"Shut up!" Swede shouted. "Don't talk about things unless you're sure of 'em! Most of the hell in this world comes from loose talk!"

"Now look," Captain Dean said hoarsely. "We can't go on this way, or we'll freeze to death. I'm still captain, and I still give orders."



Tomorrow you can elect a new captain if you think it's necessary: Just now I've got to do everything I can to see that there *is* a tomorrow for us. If we can last until daylight, and see where to put our feet, we'll find a better shelter. What we've got to do is keep moving, two at a time, all night."

Langman spoke up at once. "I say No! If anybody moves about over those ice-covered rocks, he'll break a leg."

"Nobody's asking anyone to do so," Captain Dean said. "As near as I can tell from your voice, you're opposite me: All right: get to your feet. I'll get to *my* feet. All the rest start counting out loud. Count slow. Count to a hundred. While you count, the mate and I'll stamp up and down, standing in one place, and slap our arms across our chests. When the count is one hundred, the mate and I'll help those beside us to stand up. The rest of us'll count a hundred, while they stamp their feet and swing their arms."

We had barely started when one of our number screamed horribly, and our rock hollow became a turmoil of flying arms and legs. "It's Henry," Captain Dean shouted. "Catch him and hold him!" Never before had I heard or felt a man in the throes of epilepsy, and when at last Henry Dean was pinioned and lay groaning beneath us, I knew I couldn't endure another such night.

Endlessly I rose, hunched my shoulders to the driving storm, stamped my feet, swung my arms; then pulled Neal to his feet and sank down to count to a hundred over and over again. It was like thunderous eternity, something beyond the power of a mere man to bear. If I'd been alone, I couldn't have borne it. I knew if I stopped Neal might stop. The others might stop as well; so I couldn't stop. I could only hope and pray.

My prayers were as formless as my hopes—Oh God Oh God Oh God Oh God, over and over.

Deep within me, underneath the counting aloud and the praying, were other vagrant longings for warmth, for shelter, for an end to the deafening crashing of the waves: flashes of my father and his distress if he could know of our plight; of how I, like a fool, had protested at being sent to Oxford; of how I would never again find fault with anything, provided I could be warm and dry and have friends about me. . . .

December 12th, Tuesday

THE TIME came, eventually, when, on stooping to pull Neal to his feet, I could see him dimly. Snow, mixed with rain, pelted us from the north-east, but the wet rocks on which we had ached and shivered through that long, long night were visible. The light of that pallid dawn revealed to us that we were on an island—as we all had feared since Chips Bullock had dared hazard that awful suspicion the night before. An island, but *what* an island!

It lay low in the water, like the back of a whale. The sea was so close all round us that from the hollow where we stood I could have thrown a rock into the raging breakers to north, south, east or west. Rimming the island was a border of blackness—the seaweed on which we had slithered and fallen the night before. There wasn't a handful of soil, or a bush, or any growing thing on the island. Of the *Nottingham* there wasn't a trace—not that we could see.

All but three of the fourteen of us were on our feet. Cooky Sipper lay on his face, shuddering and sobbing. Two seamen, William Saver and Charles Graystock, just lay there with their eyes closed.

"Please God!" Captain Dean said. "We can't have this! You're frightened before you need to be!"

Captain Dean took Chips Bullock's hammer from him. "I'm going to knock ice off the rocks so as to have a path to the place where we struck. All those who can walk come with me. I'll need help with the things that have washed ashore. There must be something."

He was nearly wrong. No man would believe that a ship the size of the *Nottingham* could have vanished so completely and left so little behind. We found four lengths of deck-plank, six timbers from the quarter-deck, a length of tarred rope, three pieces of canvas ripped from their fastenings, a bolt of Irish linen, a cutlass, the handle of a stewpan, a caulking mallet. Scattered among the shaggy masses of seaweed were fragments of cheese, small, like little sponges, and many spikes and nails from Chips Bullock's work-bag. Off-shore, caught on something and held in one position, was a floating tangle of yards, sails and cordage rising sluggishly to the top of each comber.

Captain Dean gave the hammer back to Chips. We could hardly hear him above the roar of the waves. "Langman, you and Mellen and Chips Bullock lay hold of the canvas, the planks and timbers and drag 'em back to the hole in the rocks. Take the tarred rope and set Cooky, Graystock and Saver to unravelling it. If you can't make 'em pick oakum, you and Mellen and White do it yourselves. There's just a chance that we can get fire out of it somehow—if it'll ever dry."

"Yes," Langman said, "and while we're doing that, you'll eat the cheese."

"Mr. Langman," Captain Dean said, "I realize you're under something of a strain. Every scrap of cheese we find will be divided into equal portions. Make no mistake about that. On this island we'll all share alike."

Captain Dean motioned to us to come close to him. "Remember one thing above all else," he shouted. "It's better to crawl on hands and knees than to risk falling."

His hands had been concealed beneath his long vest. He held them out to us so that we could see the front and back. Every finger had been cut almost to the bone by barnacles. "That's what a fall can do to you," he warned. "You can't afford to break an arm or a leg. Now spread out and hunt for those scraps of cheese."

As we found fragments of cheese, we pressed them together in apple-sized pellets, as boys make snowballs. Neal went from one to another, collecting our finds in a square of canvas. After a search that seemed endless, we had picked up about as much as would have made three whole cheeses.

Neal, making a final round, passed us the captain's orders. "He says to go back to the hole and rest," he told us. "We'll hunt again at dead low tide."

AT THE hollow, we found that Langman, Mellen and Chips had fixed two short planks over the ledge on either side, folded the ragged piece of sail across them, and weighted both sail and planks with boulders. We crawled beneath it to lie inert, packed close together. Flimsy as it was, it partly screened us from the pelting snow and rain.

Captain Dean's voice was calm and full. "We've got to find some

way to reach the canvas that's afloat. We must have that cordage for making oakum. Langman, what did you do about oakum?"

"Nothing," Langman admitted. "By the time we rigged the shelter, we were so close to frozen we crawled under it."

"Now look," Captain Dean urged, "we've got to have oakum. We can lie on it. We can braid it into something to pull over our heads and faces. Maybe we can dry it so that a flint and steel will work on it."

"Where's that cheese?" Langman asked.

"All right," the captain said. "We picked up twenty-six balls of it. I'll cut 'em in even parts. We'll eat half today and half tomorrow."

"Why should *you* say how much we can have?" Langman asked. "You promised we could take a vote today on who'd be captain. You shouldn't be captain, now there's no ship."

Captain Dean was long silent. When he did speak, his voice was placid. "How long will it take you to decide?"

"Not long," Langman said, "especially if you go outside. It won't be a fair vote if you don't. Your brother should go too. So should Whitworth. They're all on your side."

Swede spoke up. "That doesn't sound reasonable. Why don't *you* go out? You're voting for yourself, aren't you?"

"We're wasting time," Captain Dean said. "I'll go out, but Miles and my brother won't. They're entitled to vote on who they'll obey. I'll stay out long enough to cut seaweed for us to eat with the cheese. Seaweed can't hurt us, and it'll make the cheese go farther." He backed out into the snow and the rain.

"Now," Langman said, "we want to do this all fair and honest. I don't care who's made captain, but I know Cooky Sipper wants me to be. He said so just after we got the canvas up. So did Graystock and Saver. All three of 'em voted for me." The three men he was discussing just lay there, silent, motionless, almost dead.

"Well, I didn't hear 'em," Chips Bullock said. "I didn't even see Langman talk to Cooky. I vote for Captain Dean."

"You're an awful fool, Chips," Langman said. "You know as well as I do he's been trying to get us in trouble ever since we left the Nore. First it was privateers, and then there was this insurance money he was bound to get if we ran ashore."

"I vote for Captain Dean," Swede put in. "You've seen the size of this island. We didn't pile up on it because of anything he did. We had bad luck. Even if the captain had been aiming for it only a miracle would have let him come within a mile of it on a night like last night."

"I vote for Captain Dean," I said. "Neal?"

"You don't have to ask me," Neal said. "Mr. Langman cheated me before we sailed."

"And Henry Dean makes five," I said. "Why doesn't somebody try to get a word out of Saver, or Graystock, or Cooky?"

"I refuse to let such sick men be interfered with; I told you they've settled on me," Langman said. "I know Mellen and White are for me, and I'll vote for myself. That makes six."

"Well," I said, "that accounts for all but Gray and Hallion. Gray's a gunner and he scaled the guns with Swede. He must know Swede wouldn't be for Captain Dean if Mr. Langman's charges were true. I know they aren't true, and so does Swede. I'm going to ask Hallion and Gray to vote for Captain Dean."

Captain Dean's boots clattered on the rocks outside, and he came crawling back among us with an armful of dripping rock-weed clutched to his chest.

"You got no right coming in here like this," Langman shouted. "We haven't finished voting."

"I vote for Captain Dean," Gray said.

"Me too," Hallion said.

I told the captain that there were seven for him and six against.

"I'm surprised," he said. "I only expected three against me."

"Mr. Langman voted Cooky Sipper, Graystock and Saver against you," I said.

THE SEAWEED, slippery to the tongue, had something of the sea's freshness about it, and when chewed with cheese it wasn't bad.

"You got no right to make people eat that," Langman said. "You never know what's poison."

"You don't have to eat it if you don't want to," Captain Dean said. "It's just a way of making the cheese go farther."

I could have eaten all the other half of the cheese that the captain had

carefully rewrapped in the piece of canvas to save for the next day. By itself the weed wasn't good, and when my little square of cheese was gone, I ate no more weed.

ON OUR second journey to the northern shore of the island, the captain, by the grace of God, found a coil of cordage wound round a boulder that could just be reached when an outgoing breaker went hissing and rattling back over the black seaweed. But between the out-rush of one breaker and the bellowing inrush of the next, there was no time to untangle the rope.

"Think of something," the captain urged. "Somehow we've got to have that cordage and canvas."

Chips stepped forward to the captain's side. "If we could get a running bowline on the cordage beyond the rock," he said, "it might hold until we caught it."

The captain stared speculatively at the rock round which the cordage was twined. It was set in a patch of crushed shells and pebbles; the cordage was jammed between the gravelly stuff and the boulder's base. He nodded his head.

Langman was sent hurrying off for the piece of rope from which the oakum was to have been made. Five minutes later Swede and the captain were showing Neal, the lightest and in all likelihood quickest of our company, the working of a running bowline.

Neal put me in mind of an otter. At a signal from the captain he slid down the weed in the wake of the receding wave. He threw the rope before him and over the boulder as a boy throws a skipping-rope: fell on his stomach over the boulder top: slipped the loose end of the rope under the cordage and through the noose. Just as a towering breaker curled before breaking, he darted back, the rope-end in his hand, no wetter than when he had jumped down.

THE REST of that day was horrible beyond words. We hauled at that dripping cordage, fearful each moment that it would part from the floating timbers and sails to which it was attached. The labour of hauling in that raft of junk seemed greater than men could undertake. The raft was attached to something—perhaps to a part of the sunken

hull, so that I had the feeling we were trying to draw up a part of the ocean floor.

Worse than that, it was dripping wet, and the handling of wet cordage in a December north-easter becomes insupportable because of the violent aching in the hands. Equally bad was our dubious footing. As we gained ground on the cordage, we slipped, fell on the icy ledges, and still contrived to move more and more of the cordage inshore: to find boulders round which to belay it, lest our gains be snatched from us by the voracious seas.

For the first time, that day, we saw the flood tide march up to the high-water mark, to leave our poor island barely rising above the tops of the combers that swept at us and past us. If at flood tide the breakers crowded up so close, where would they be when December's spring tide was upon us? Twice a month, at new moon and full moon, every shore has its spring tide, far higher than ordinary tides.

How could my tutors and professors at Oxford have pretended to find truth and beauty in the adventures of Ulysses? Ulysses, confronted by such tribulations as those that surrounded us, couldn't have helped himself, could only have turned to and been succoured by the gods. In a vision Minerva would have told him how to discover a great store of cheese. Ever-dependable Mercury would have built for him a stout ship from newly cut timber—yes, and seasoned it for him, too.

But the unhappy truth was that nothing like the *Odyssey* has ever been or ever will be. If Ulysses had been with us on our rock, he'd have been exactly in our situation—despairing, helpless, hopeless, and perpetually on the verge of death.

*December 13th, Wednesday*

I HOPED that when the north-easter blew itself out the sea would grow calm, but it didn't. When the wind swung, it backed into the north-west and west, meaning that bad weather had only temporarily abated. We were free of driving snow and rain, but breakers still roared deafeningly to the north and to left and right.

With the break of day I heard Captain Dean calling Neal to come outside. I went out, too, to find the captain staring off to the north-west.

"Neal," he asked, "can you recall the chief places you lettered on the maps, starting with Cape Porpoise?"

Neal said he could. "Cape Porpoise, Cape Arundel, Bald Head Cliff, Cape Neddick——"

"That's it," the captain cried. "Bald Head Cliff! That's where the waves shoot up, yonder, and this is Boon Island! The last time I sailed east from Portsmouth, I sailed between Boon Island and Cape Neddick. Boon Island was to starboard and Bald Head Cliff to larboard."

As the eastern sky grew brighter we could see spouts of spray rising high against the rock face of Bald Head Cliff. Captain Dean, cheered by the sight of the mainland, crawled back beneath the shelter.

"Listen," he said. "I know where we are. We're on Boon Island: just south of us are the Isles of Shoals. All winter there's fishing off the Isles of Shoals. The Pepperrells and other Portsmouth people have fish stages there. If we set up something they can see, they'll find us. But unless all of you get out and go to work, we won't be able to set up anything. Your blood won't circulate. You'll die. You've got to come out and drag cordage and junk."

Nobody said a word.

"Another thing," Captain Dean said. "There's seals off the south side of this island. I saw their heads in the water, following me and watching me. If I can catch one of 'em asleep about midnight, we'll have enough to eat for a month. We'll have fat that maybe we can set fire to."

But I knew a little something about seals from watching them come up the Thames after whitebait. In this kind of weather, they slept while floating where waves rocked them like a cradle. Neither Captain Dean nor anybody else was going to find a seal sleeping on ledges where a single wave would crush him against a rock as easily as it could smash a dinghy.

"Where's the rest of that cheese?" Langman asked.

"Here," Captain Dean said. "Those who want it must come out and get it." He backed out, and behind him crawled the remnants of our wretched company, with the exception of Cooky Sipper. Even Graystock and Saver came out, looking like corpses.

The captain sent Neal for seaweed to eat with the cheese. He gave each of us a little cube. When he came to Graystock and Saver, he eyed



them contemptuously. "I'm giving you yesterday's and today's cheese too. You don't deserve either. You've been letting the rest of us work for you; by rights your rations ought to go to those who've been doing the work."

"We were ill, and couldn't work," Graystock said.

"You're a liar," Captain Dean said. "Cooky Sipper's ill and can't stand up, but you're no more ill than the rest of us. You're scared, that's all."

The captain was furious, no doubt about it, but he held himself under control. He turned to the rest of us. "Now I know where I am," he said harshly, "now I'm able to see the things God gave us so that we can help ourselves and each other, I'm going to say something to anyone who thinks he can behave like Saver and Graystock."

"It's your duty as captain," Langman said, "to encourage your men: not to discourage 'em."

Captain Dean rounded on him. "What do you think I *am* doing? You ought to be called Wrong-end Langman! Graystock and Saver by refusing to work are setting the rest of us an example in discouragement and despair. Nobody ever accomplished anything in this world without working day and night. You know the most discouraging thing in the world, Langman? It's for a lot of hard-working people to have to look at and listen to those who'd like to keep on living without doing anything at all."

"I suppose," Langman said, "I was Wrong-end Langman when I said you wanted to run us ashore."

Captain Dean looked at him long and hard. "Mr. Langman, don't forget that you were No-look-out Langman before we struck. Just what is it that you'd do, at this moment, if you had the say?"

"I'd build a boat," Langman said promptly.

"With nothing but a hammer, a cutlass, a caulking mallet and our pocket-knives?" Captain Dean asked.

Langman glowered at him.

"I'll tell you exactly what we must do first of all," Captain Dean said. "We have to find the highest point on this rock where we can step a mast with a canvas flag on it that people on shore may see. Then we have to build a tent round it."

"Even before we do that we need oakum to lie on: oakum to protect our faces and hands and feet: oakum for caps and mittens and belly-bands: oakum to keep the wind from blowing the tent to pieces: oakum to keep the rain from driving through the canvas. What's more, we can't build a boat until we have oakum.

"So immediately we'll start to separate all the junk we pulled ashore yesterday. I'm putting Neal Butler in charge of making white oakum from the tangled cordage and black oakum from the tarred shrouds. He's to take Hallion with him and Saver and Graystock and George White. They'll have to use their own pocket-knives."

The captain told Chips Bullock and Swede Butler they were to find a crevice for the mast. When the mast was stepped, all usable things were to be brought up close to it. Captain Dean, Henry Dean, Langman, Gray, Mellen and I were to separate the yards from the junk fastened to them and save all the cordage that could be used to lash down the tent.

THE RUIN a furious ocean can wreak on a stout ship is beyond the comprehension of those who haven't seen it. It wrenches spikes from wet wood. It knots cordage into such intricacies as hangman's knots, double cat's-paws, three-bight Turk's-heads. It smashes a main yard in the slings, strips a stern post from an inner post as readily as a child twists off a doll's foot.

The first thing we freed from the mass of junk was the fore-top-sail yard for Chips and Swede to use as the centre post of the tent. It was lodged in a frozen hoorah's-nest of canvas, rigging and ratlins that defied our knives almost as though it had been made of iron. It was only half freed when Neal came stumbling to us.

"Cooky's dead," he told the captain.

The captain stared hard at Neal: then straightened up to look at the breakers.

"I see," he said. He caught up a rope-end and haggled off a fifteen-foot length.

"Well," he said slowly, "go back to your oakum pickers. Send White to the shelter. He and I'll take care of Cooky. We'll have to take him to the south shore and put him in the water. There's just a possibility

he might float to York and start someone looking for us." To me he said, "Keep right on as you are. See the others do, too." He gave me the hammer.

"Couldn't you take his coat for yourself?" Neal asked.

"Why yes," Captain Dean said, "I think it would be all right to take his coat."

WE HAD the fore-topsail yard cleared by mid-afternoon, soon after Swede and Chips came for it and for a square of canvas to use as a flag. They had, they said, found a ledge with a deep crack in it—one into which a spar could be pushed and shimmed into place with wedge-shaped rocks.

"Once we get that spar in place," Swede said to Langman, "it'll outlast you."

Langman looked scornful. "If we don't build a boat, it'll outlast all of us."

Chips swung his head from side to side. "I wish I had my axe," he said irrelevantly. "When we were cleaning that slot for the spar, we found slivers of rock. They're shaped like splitting wedges. We can use 'em for chisels if they don't splinter when pounded."

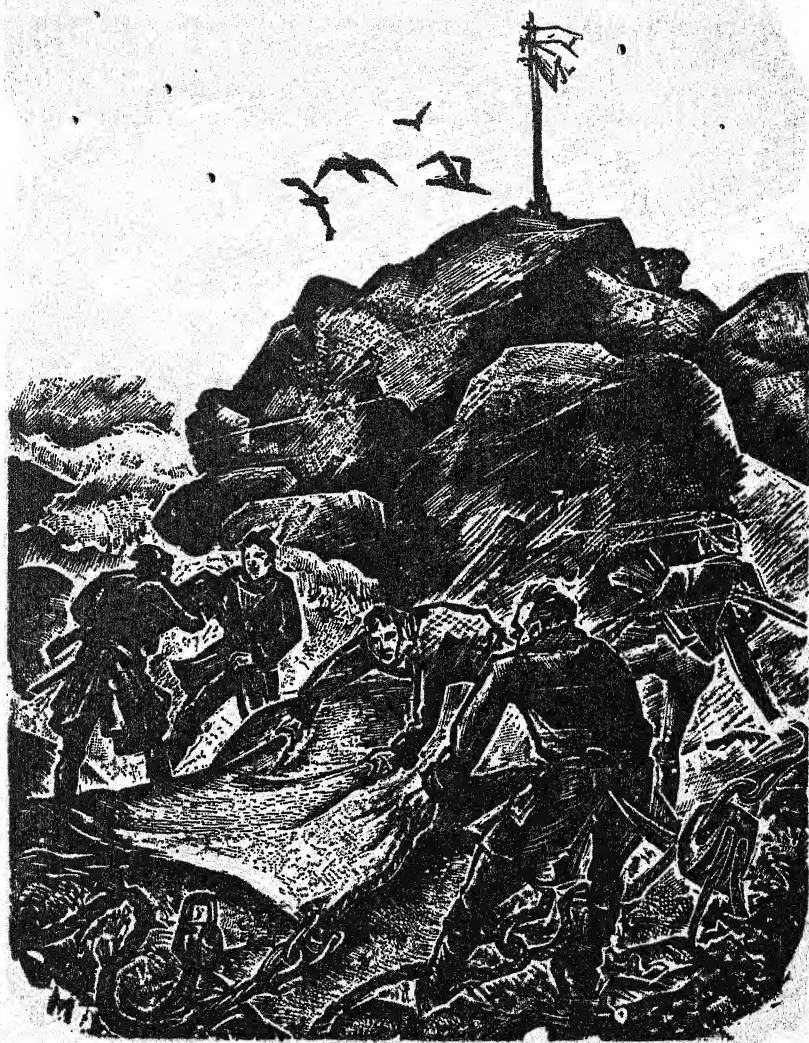
He and Swede carried away the fore-topsail yard and the square of canvas; but dark came down on us before we were able to unsnarl the sails that were wrapped with rigging as a fly is wrapped in a spider-web. So we spent that night in the shelter in which Cooky had sobbed and moaned night after night.

Night after night?

Had we been three nights in that shelter? Why no! It was only *two* nights. I found it difficult to keep track. The first night we'd spent in a hollow, without covering. The next two nights we'd had a strip of canvas above us.

Cooky had always groaned and sobbed; and lying somewhere near him was another who moaned and groaned. It may have been Graystock. It may have been Saver. It could, God knows, have been almost any one of us.

Things were different with Cooky gone. Not better, perhaps, but quieter.



*December 14th, Thursday*

A MAN can't, I know, stay awake indefinitely, yet I'd have sworn I never slept on the night of the thirteenth. All night long my feet and legs either throbbled or burnt or itched. Each one of those three ills seemed unendurable by itself, and there was no respite from the constant movement of the men round me—an uneasy thrashing, as dogs thrash when wounded and in distress.

With daylight, I could see as well as feel the reason for my ailing legs and feet. My legs had swelled until they filled my sea-boots, and a ridge of flesh puffed out above the boot tops.

Captain Dean, examining his own legs, said there was no help for it: the boots would have to go. He raised his voice to make it heard above the rumble and smashing of the breakers:

"Sharpen your knives, everyone," he said. "You'll find whetstones under you. Here's what you'll have to do—and save the stitching. We'll need it to tie bandages." He severed the top stitch of the boot seam that runs down the inner part of the leg, then picked out the remaining thread as far down as the ankle. Then he carefully cut off the boot. Both foot and leg were shocking sights, the leg puffed and blistered, the toes pallid.

The captain drew a sharp breath. "You'll have to expect a little pain at first," he said, "but that's only the blood coming back into your legs." Then he said, "Before any of the rest of you start cutting off your boots, you'd better go out for canvas. We'll have to make something to put on our feet so we can walk."

"Walk with feet like yours?" Langman asked.

"I don't have to answer that, do I," Captain Dean said. "We've got to walk. More cheese might come ashore. We've got to have more oakum. We've got to move out from this wet shelter into a tent. We can't make oakum or raise a tent unless we go outside. To do that we'll have to wash our legs in something warm that'll clean 'em."

"Something warm!" Langman cried. "Where'll you find anything warm round here?"

"Everyone has to relieve himself, doesn't he?" Captain Dean said.

I was shocked and frightened by that glimpse of the captain's leg and foot. I was sure my own legs were no different; and I was filled with a frenzy to pick the oakum necessary to protect them.

Those who have never picked oakum—and few people do it except sailors when there's nothing else to be done on shipboard, or those who live in prisons or poor-houses—find it tedious, hard on the hands and on the nerves, to separate those stiff strands of fibre that make up a rope; then, with finger-twistings and knife points, to fluff out each strand so that it becomes again a flattened mat of hemp.

But when oakum is needed to save legs and feet, almost anyone works hard and quickly learns the knack of reducing a cable or a hawser to its original state of untwisted strands.

At the captain's direction we practised first on him, cutting two six-foot lengths of linen from the bolt, and a short length to use as a sponge. Each six-foot strip was a double bandage, down one side of the leg, round an oakum poultice on the foot, and up the other side of the leg. For years I woke screaming from a dream of what would have happened to me if we'd not had that bolt of linen to bind our legs. Over the outer layer of linen we wrapped a square of canvas.

The captain had us slit the legs of his underwear and his breeches, and these were tied in place with the thread taken from his boots. Since the bandages were so bulky as to make the boots useless, he cut off the boot tops and made each top into a sort of knee-pad, bound round his knee by strands of tarred rope.

When we had finished with Captain Dean, he helped Neal and me to cut off our boots and bandage our legs and feet. Before he turned back my first boot, he put his hand on my knee. "Don't look at them," he said. "They aren't as bad as they look, and you'll gain nothing by seeing them." There was no doubt in my mind that he was right, and I think that, by obeying him, both Neal and I saved ourselves from self-pity or despondency—states of mind that never bettered anyone.

With Neal and me to help him, Captain Dean sat the rest of the crew on the two ledges that had formed the wall of our shelter, and over their knees he laid the canvas beneath which we had slept. Using the canvas as a table, they picked oakum while below the canvas the captain, Neal and I, on our padded knees, worked on those legs and feet.

One thing my sojourn on Boon Island did for me: it made me impatient of a person who, because of fancied ill health or discomfort, fails to execute a task or complete an undertaking. No man is worth his salt if, by such a failure, he inconveniences others.

*December 15th, Friday*

SIX OF US were able—perhaps “willing” is a better word—to crawl from beneath the canvas into the cold dawn of the morning after we had bandaged our legs. All thirteen of us should have come out, for the tide, high at daybreak, might have deposited something edible on shore, and our craving for something to put in our stomachs was almost overpowering.

Those beside myself who dragged themselves out were Captain Dean, Neal and Swede Butler, Langman and White—and God knows I probably couldn’t have done it if the captain hadn’t crawled out first, with Neal close behind him. What Neal could do, I told myself, I must do. Langman only came with us, I think, because of his overwhelming fear that one of us might find a scrap to eat and conceal it from him. White, I thought, came because he was a bos’n, and averse to being outdone by anyone.

As we made our painful patrol of the high-water mark, we saw two seals playfully nosing at a floating object, swimming round and under it, whisking at it with their hind flippers, until the water shoaled. When a breaker thrust their plaything against the rock, we saw it to be two bones from salted beef, held together by the muscles of the joint. To add to this bit of good fortune, Captain Dean came across a lump of cheese the size of a child’s head, and Langman found a mussel from which grew scores of long streamers of thin kelp, which Langman insisted were good to eat. The mussel he discarded with an expression of distaste.

“A mussel is full of meat,” the captain protested. “Well, one mussel wouldn’t have gone far among thirteen men, but there’s more where that one came from.”

When we returned to the canvas shelter with this treasure-trove, the others came out. Each was given a streamer of kelp; and all of them, as



intent as an audience at a play, watched us smash those beef bones with rocks, and, with knife blades, extract a dab of marrow for each man.

"We'll eat all the cheese now," Captain Dean said. "Maybe, when the tide is down, we'll find enough mussels to give us a real meal.

"Now," he went on, "we'll all go to the flag mast and build the tent and pick more oakum for it. We can't spend another night in this rotten shelter."

The men, haggard, bearded, just stared at him. I think they were only a quarter conscious, partly paralysed by the biting cold of the night just past.

Three of them—Saver, Graystock and Mellen—crawled silently back beneath the canvas.

Captain Dean stooped to peer after them. Then he gave up. After all, there's no use driving those who have passed the limit of endurance.

THE SIZE and shape of the tent were determined by the narrow triangular area of the ledge that held the centre pole. It was three-sided, like a pyramid, and its height was the distance between the rock and the lowest lashing of the canvas flag on the centre pole.

Captain Dean helped us set in place the corner posts for the tent. While he lashed them to the mast, the rest of us dragged pieces of sail across the rocks, arranging them so that they could be fastened to the corner posts with spun yarn. The canvas at the base of each of the three sides was anchored by broken pieces of deck-planking, held down by three rows of boulders—big boulders, too large to be handled by one man.

Langman worked as hard as anyone, but he never stopped talking about the boat.

"What good's a tent going to do us if the full-moon spring tide rises above the top of this rock?" he said. "Nothing will help us then but a boat."

"Look," Captain Dean said, "I've measured this rock. Just here where we're standing, as near as I can calculate, it's fourteen feet above normal high-water mark. According to my reckoning, the tide rise here is seven feet. I don't believe any spring tide could be three times as high as a normal tide."



"It *can* be," Langman said. "There's a place round Nova Scotia where the tide rises and falls twenty-eight feet. I've heard Woodes Rogers say so when he was sailing to Newfoundland."

"I know the place," Captain Dean said, "but that's way north of here. And I'll tell you another thing, Langman. This is the fifteenth of December, and according to my lights——"

"It's the sixteenth," Langman interrupted. "Tomorrow's Sunday."

"No," the captain said, "this is the fifteenth. Sunday isn't until the day after tomorrow."

"I worked it out," Langman said. "Tomorrow's Sunday."

"There's no sense arguing over which day's Sunday," Captain Dean said. "The thing I want to impress on you is that my reckoning shows full moon to be due December twenty-seventh, a Wednesday. We must have had one spring tide already, because there should have been a new moon day before yesterday."

"The twenty-seventh would be a Thursday," Langman said.

"Well, whichever day of the week it is," Captain Dean said, "it's twelve days to spring tide, and if we don't get this shelter done, and the tide *does* rise that extra fourteen feet, and we *do* have another onshore blow, and we *do* have to have a boat to save our lives, we can't *have* a boat unless we shelter ourselves during those twelve days between now and spring tide. The tent has to come first."

It was this day that Henry Dean and Nicholas Mellen, fumbling round a little pile of junk we hadn't yet untangled, came across the rawhide seizing of one of the yards. It looked like a piece of soggy cowhide about eighteen inches wide and two feet long.

When Henry Dean brought it back there was an instant demand that it be distributed for food.

"Food!" Henry Dean exclaimed. "You can't . . ." But the captain felt it with speculative fingers. "It wouldn't hurt 'em," he said slowly. "Food is what you think it is. A lot of men live on things that wouldn't be much help to other men. Probably you wouldn't care much about eating a mouse, but Chinese do and think they're nice. You divide this rawhide into thirteen pieces. Give one piece to each man, and make him chop his own into little pieces, just as fine as he can mince it."

Perhaps that rawhide did give everyone a little strength; for after each had eaten his share, those in the tent went back to picking oakum. When night came we not only had shelter over us, but we had a layer of oakum beneath us—a thin one, to be sure, but one that wasn't wet. It was damp, yes; but it wasn't wet, and up to now we had been wet every night—wet, and cold. Those who live beneath roofs, with dry clothes next to their skins, can't imagine what it's like to exist surrounded by a tumult of breakers, in wet clothes, on sharp wet rocks, and in cold so intense that every boulder is covered with a thick armour of ice.

In the tent we could stand up, if only three or four stood at a time. The rest could sit up. At night, we still lay tight against each other, belly to buttocks so to take advantage of the slight warmth that each of us, by the grace of God, contrived to hold within himself.

### *December 16th, Saturday*

THE WORLD, I've found, is full of people who cannot realize that *everything* is hard work—everything. People turn to fishing, or to painting, or to playwriting—to any one of a thousand different occupations—with some sort of a vague idea that it's easy work. Sometimes work can be enthralling if it's done as an avocation instead of out of dire necessity, but it's hard work just the same.

So I question that the building of our boat on Boon Island was harder work than writing a play, or herding sheep, or chopping wood; but I suspect that no work has ever been done under more adverse circumstances.

The place we selected to build the boat was on the south side of the island, where ledge fingers ran slopingly out towards the south. The ledges were less abrupt there than on the other three sides, and the surf less violent.

The day had started inauspiciously because Langman, having determined that the day was Sunday instead of Saturday, had whispered sulkily with Mellen and White and come to the conclusion that to work on Sunday was wrong.

Captain Dean shook his head wearily. "Mr. Langman," he said, "I

have no intention of attempting to speak for God, but you evidently have a personal God that differs in some respects from mine. My God accepts those who worship Him, regardless of whether they worship on Greenwich time or on Cape Porpoise time."

"That's blasphemy," Langman said quickly.

"What's blasphemous about it?" Swede asked.

"Let him call it anything he likes," Captain Dean said. "In good weather we've always observed the Sabbath on my ships, but if a storm happened to hit us on Sunday, we did anything necessary for the welfare of the ship. I think God will forgive you for working on Sunday. You'll take your turn at hauling plank, and so will Mellen and White, just as if it were Saturday, which it is."

"That's more blasphemy, and it's still Sunday," Langman insisted.

Swede looked at him as if he wanted to kill him, and I wish he had.

A SMOOTH piece of ledge just above the seaweed fringe was our shipyard, our launching stage, our naval storehouse. Our only tools were our pocket-knives, Chips's hammer, the caulking mallet and the cutlass.

Our only shipbuilding materials were the remnants of the *Nottingham*. With Chips's hammer we had strained our muscles to draw nails and spikes from the wet planks we had recovered, but we had failed so lamentably that our chief reliance for putting the boat together was the nails and spikes salvaged from Chips's work-bag.

While those of us able to walk dragged timbers, planks, canvas and cordage to the launching stage, the captain and Swede undertook to make the cutlass into a saw. Chips thought of the way to do it but, having gone down with the same sort of illness that had finished Cooky Sipper, he was too weak to do anything except advise how it might be done.

The captain and Swede brought sharp-edged rocks into the tent. While Swede held the blade of the cutlass supported at an angle against a rock, as a man holds a razor blade slantingly against his cheek, the captain would smash at the blade with a thin stone. Thus V-shaped nicks were broken out of the cutlass blade, until it became a series of ragged saw teeth. Then Swede and Chips rubbed each nick with rocks until both sides had bevelled edges and the teeth were almost sharp.

When they started I didn't believe they could do it. Since Boon Island, I believe the right sort of man can do anything. Even less than I believed, a saw could be made from the cutlass did I believe that a seaworthy boat would emerge from the materials at hand, but we *did* build it, even though we had less with which to work than strolling players would need to build a stage in a barn.

IN SPITE of all our handicaps, we had something to hearten us, for on this day mussels in quantity were discovered in the western pools and indentations.

Each day at dawn and sunset, and again at high and low tide, patrols assigned by the captain searched the island for scraps of wreckage or bits of food. Early in the afternoon, at low tide, Captain Dean and George White left the shipyard to bring back our daily repast of seaweed and ice. In cutting seaweed, they uncovered a pool in which a mussel was attached to the hard-packed mixture of shell and rock fragments that lay at the bottom of all such depressions.

It was one of the big mottled sea mussels, unlike the clean blue ones that grow in beds on gravel spits near the mouths of rivers. This one was an old, old mussel. However, it was unquestionably a mussel, and a mussel is food.

When the captain had prodded the shell free of the trash in which it grew, White snatched it from the water—snatched it because of the unbearable cold of that salt water. Then Captain Dean and White, crawling to other pools, raked the weed back from the edges. In the end they uncovered thirty-nine—three apiece: repulsive-looking and lumpy. In spite of their looks, they seemed savoury enough to us—once we had learned how to rid them of the infinitesimal pearls with which they were infested. The pearls could only be removed by squeezing them out: by rubbing the meat between the tongue and the roof of the mouth.

Certainly I have never wanted another mussel since those days, but they gave our seaweed a fishy juiciness wholly lacking when the seaweed was eaten alone.

I think they must have strengthened us somewhat, for after I had choked them down I returned more hopefully to my labours on that hopeless boat.

FOR THE bottom of the boat we stretched an oblong of canvas flat on the sloping rock, weighting each corner with a boulder so that it couldn't blow. On the canvas we laid three planks side by side. The ends of those planks were jagged. We had no way of rounding them off except by smashing them with a hammer, since the saw was too precious to waste on anything trivial; so all that day was spent in getting ready to build rather than in building, and—seemingly most important of all—in endless discussions as to who should go in the boat if it was ever finished.

*December 17th, Sunday*

EVEN Saver and Graystock, those lumps of men who wouldn't pick oakum unless they felt like it, and Chips Bullock, who was willing to work but couldn't, wanted to be in that boat when she was launched, if she ever *was* launched. Probably this was because today, our first Sunday, the captain discovered, on the snow-covered fields of the mainland, moving specks that must have been people—church-goers, in all likelihood.

I think by that time we were all of us half-demented, for we shouted and waved our arms, hoping to catch the attention of those far-off specks—and surely there wasn't one of us who didn't know that we could be no more apparent to those on shore than a seal would have been. But the sight of those moving specks upon that distant slope made each of us conscious of how near we were to bread and meat, to warmth and drink and other people; so even before the floor of the boat was completed, all but a few were urging that they be allowed to go ashore in her.

Two exceptions were Swede and Neal. Swede didn't say it openly, but he was determined Neal must be saved, if anyone was. And equally apparent was Neal's determination not to leave his father.

I sympathized with Swede. If I had the say as to who should go in the boat, I'd have picked Captain Dean first and Neal second: the captain because he was strongest and would have influence on shore; Neal because he was youngest and with the greatest possibilities. But I would never have picked Swede. His feet were so crippled that I considered

him useless—which eventually taught me never to underrate a determined man, no matter how helpless he may seem.

The glimpse we'd had of those people on shore must have made even the captain worse than desperate; for once, when he went to the tent to consult Chips Bullock, he took out a piece of black oakum from next to his skin and held it out for us to feel. "Is it dry?" he asked. Swede and Neal and I said that to us it still felt damp; but all the others, Langman, included, pretended to find it dry.

So he got out the gunpowder he had saved, put a pinch of it in the pan of his useless pistol, wrapped the lock and the pan with the oakum, snapped the flint . . . snapped it: snapped it.

We could see the spark inside the oakum; smell a delicious, tantalizing odour of tarry scorching. There was even a faint hint of smoke. He kept on pulling the hammer back and snapping it. Then he passed it to Langman, who did the same. Then Langman passed it to me, and I tried and tried.

All we got was a faint wisp of tarry-smelling smoke.

Another thing I learned to dislike on Boon Island was the wise-acre who is always saying, "Where there's smoke, there's fire." *Where there's smoke, there's fire*, indeed! I couldn't have borne that on Boon Island!

SINCE THIS was Sunday, we held services in the tent. Captain Dean led us in a prayer that thanked God for His mercy in letting us stay alive; that thanked Him for granting us ice to chew and mussels to eat; that implored God to let us be seen from the mainland; that begged Him to send a ship near this dreadful rock.

All of us repeated his words in a hoarse and shivering chorus—all except Langman and White and Mellen, who, having decided the day wasn't Sunday, refused to pray with us.

I think, though, Langman was somehow helped by those Sunday services, in spite of being so certain that our Sunday was the wrong one; because when Neal and I made our last patrol of the day at dead low tide, about three o'clock in the afternoon, Langman came with us, and so did George White. They helped us in our daily search for mussels, so that we were able to bring back eight for each man.

*December 18th, Monday*

WE CALLED the different days of the week by the names of occurrences, and I thought for a time that this day would be called Oar Day—the day before having been our first Sunday, and the day before that Boat Day, and the day before that Tent Day, and the day before that The Day We Cut Off Our Boots, and the day before that Cooky Sipper's Day.

All days seemed endless; the nights were a torment of aching cold, of fear, of trepidation—ah, those nights, with the breakers thundering at our very shoulders! Always, in the night, I had thoughts of eternity; of death, and of never-ending punishment that might continue for ever, for ever, for ever. . . .

SEVEN OARS for seven men we'd planned for the boat, and a longer steering oar.

In order to make them we had to saw planks to the proper length, then split the planks with sharpened rocks. That was a labour undertaken by Neal and Swede and me while the captain and Langman planned the fastening of the boat's sides.

The cutlass-saw was the instrument we used to saw those planks; and for incarnate hellishness that saw was perfectly designed to plague persons already plagued to the limit of endurance.

The handle was too small to allow the use of both hands, and the starting of a cut with those jagged teeth was a trial. There seemed to be no way of holding the wet planks firm. We succeeded at last, after a fashion, by wedging one end of the plank beneath a boulder and forcing the opposite end upward. Then the wielder of the saw, stretching himself under the plank, would haggle at it until enough wood had been gnawed away to allow the plank to be broken.

But our labours on the oars were dwarfed by a discovery made by the captain. At dead high tide, about ten o'clock, he raised a hoarse shout and pointed off to the south with his oakum-wrapped hand.

Beyond the breakers, beyond the round seal heads puffing out their whiskers at us, were the sails of three vessels—the first sign of a sail we

had seen. To me, who had felt sure that no fisherman would venture out of port at this season of the year, they brought a choking surge of hope.

They were moving straight out, to the eastward, probably from Portsmouth; the captain said: taking provisions to the Isles of Shoals, perhaps, or going for cargoes of salt cod.

Everyone waved his arms and hallooed hoarsely. The three vessels seemed to be about nine miles off. No shout can be heard at a distance of nine miles. All of us knew that. Perhaps our shouts were a form of prayer.

When the sails, sliding gradually to the eastward, became dim specks on the horizon, the oakum pickers crawled back to the tent. Neal and Swede and I returned to making oars. The task before us seemed insurmountable—as impossible, almost, as drilling a hole through a block of granite with a needle.

### *December 19th, Tuesday*

THOSE OARS, I thought, were the most troublesome thing about the boat—though I suppose that each part of every enterprise always seems most difficult and most important to the one to whom it's entrusted.

None the less, the oars seemed vital, for unless the wind was in the east, we couldn't depend on our sail to carry us to the nearest land, which, by Captain Dean's reckoning, was six miles away. Row we must, not only to get the boat across that turbulent stretch of water, but to keep ourselves moving so that we wouldn't freeze.

Even under favourable circumstances we would be three hours, at least, rowing that clumsy boat to shore. The split-plank oars were the same width from end to end. Now they had to be narrowed at one end, and smoothed, so that men could use them effectively. Our knives made no impression on the sharp edges of the wet boards; they only roughened when we tried to bevel the corners.

The best we could do, in the end, was to rub each oar against a ledge, working it round and round, rasping at it until we brought it to some faint semblance of smoothness. I couldn't let myself think what such



oars would do to the hands of those who paddled with them, even when the hands were padded with oakum.

Tide was high at eleven; so at daybreak, before we went to work on those devilish oars, Neal and I patrolled the island. Hungrily, we tried to stalk four gulls at high-water mark. As we approached, one picked up something, flew straight up with it: then dropped it on the rocks, so that we knew it was a mussel. When we shouted and waved our arms, the gulls flew away, mewing. Neal picked up the mussel, broken by its fall, and divided it with me.

As he chewed at that orange-coloured meat, spitting out seed pearls, he moved from me to stare off to the eastward, where low, shelving ledges made an easy descent to the rising waves. I followed the direction of his gaze, and my eyes caught what his had caught—a short stick, a trifle bent, standing up straight from those shelving ledges.

There was something about the curve of that stick that filled me with an almost insupportable excitement. I knew it couldn't be what it vaguely resembled! It couldn't be! Such things happened only in the *Odyssey*, and through the direct intervention of Minerva.

Neal crawled out on the seaweed. I held his arm while he reached into the swirling surf for the stick.

It was exactly what it had looked like the moment we saw it. It was an axe helve, and on the end of it, yellowed with salt-water rust, was the axe head, with the hone marks still showing on the still-sharp blade!

It's amazing how small a thing can make such a difference to so many people!

Without that axe we were almost helpless, though I think we were never wholly hopeless. With the axe, our spirits rose, our work no longer stood like an impenetrable wall before us.

We hurried the axe to Captain Dean and Langman: showed it to those in the tent, to raise their spirits. They passed it from hand to hand.

With Neal holding each board upright, wedged between rocks, the axe chipped smooth slivers from the corners of the planks. The portions to be gripped by the hands of the rowers became round. Neal and I exchanged places at intervals, for the sake of warmth; but I think the thing that kept us warmest was the feeling of miraculous accomplishment.

*December 20th, Wednesday*

THE BOAT was shaped like a punt, with square ends and square sides. The floor boards had been laid on canvas; and when they had been caulked as well as we could do it, the canvas was drawn up round the sides and ends like a shroud. Her height was a little increased by running a long strip of canvas round her, fastened to the stanchions; but it had to be low so that the kneeling men could use the oars as paddles.

We spent all day putting the final touches on her—if anything about that boat could be called final. She was a marvel of incompleteness. Remembering now how she looked, I can't believe that so many of us were eager to trust ourselves to her. The easiest thing to say is that we were insane because of the things we'd endured. Yet we weren't wholly demented, because we made half a dozen bailing scoops.

We spent the last hours, right up to dark, in cutting seaweed to floor the passageway down which the boat would have to be pushed in order to reach the sea. Without protection, the canvas would have been cut to ribbons on barnacles by the time we got her to the water.

In the tent, that night, I may have slept a little, but only a little, because of the excited discussions as to when the boat should be launched—dawn, high tide, low tide. Most of the arguments, naturally, made no sense at all. Sometimes my hearing blurred, and there seemed to be breaks in the talk. This, I suppose, was sleep, for when my ears snapped open, someone, always, was talking.

Langman in the beginning argued against all starting times that were proposed, and in the end argued for all of them. I think he wanted to take credit for anything good that happened, and dodge the responsibility for anything bad. The world is full of people like that, but most of them haven't Langman's malice.

*December 21st, Thursday*

THE DAY, to the amazement and delight of all, was better for our purpose than any we had so far seen, though bitter cold. The sun rose red but unclouded, and there was a glassy sheen on the sea. On the

south shore the swells surged in without breaking to spend themselves in foam along the brown seaweed-covered fingers of ledge.

The captain urged everyone from the tent at daybreak. "Tide's dead low," he shouted. "We've got a lot to do today, so try to get enough mussels to last you through tomorrow."

I knew what he had in mind. He hadn't liked the look of that sky in the east. When we were back in the tent he said, "I know we made oars for seven; but I've come to the conclusion that seven is too many to pack into such a boat. It seems to me that two would be better than seven."

A roar of protest met his words.

"If only two go," Swede cried, "you wouldn't take Neal, and it was Neal found the axe! If anybody deserves to go, Neal does."

"It was my axe to begin with," Chips rasped. "I need medical help."

"It wasn't yours after you'd lost it," Swede said.

Langman shouted, "You needn't think I'm going to sit here like a bump on a log while the captain goes ashore to spread the news about how he didn't wreck us on Boon Island on purpose! I'm going in that boat if anyone does! I insist on taking White and Mellen."

"It's too many," the captain insisted. "But if that's the way you want it, Mr. Langman, I'll fill the boat. I'll take Neal, and my brother because he *is* my brother, and I'll take Mr. Whitworth because I promised his father I'd share and share alike with him."

A chorus of complaint went up from Saver and Graystock, that wholly worthless pair, from Chips Bullock, who was so weak from his lung trouble that he could hardly get to his feet, from Gray and Hallion. We crawled from the tent as fast as we could, and for once were grateful for the ear-filling rumble of the breakers, which kept us from hearing the brainless clacking of those we left behind.

IT WAS DECIDED that when we slid the boat into the water at dead high tide, the captain and Neal Butler should be in her, while the rest of us waded in to hold her firm until she was free and clear. Then the captain was to pull in Langman, whereupon the two of them would hoist in the other four, with Neal steadying the boat with the steering oar.

At the launching ledge the captain's eyes wandered from man to man

of the six unkempt specimens of humanity we were leaving behind. "Well," he said, "pray for courage, and don't stop moving. If we can reach shore, you'll have help."

He seemed to search his mind for something more to say, couldn't find it and so laid hold of the bow of the boat and started her down the seaweed-strewn ledge towards the water.

"Where's the axe?" Langman asked. "Where's the hammer?"

White stumbled up and gave Langman the tools.

"Captain Dean," Swede shouted. "Don't let 'em take those tools! You've got to leave us something!"

The captain spoke mildly to Langman. "You might as well leave them."

Langman faced Dean defiantly. "They couldn't use 'em, even if we left 'em," he said. "Even if there was anything to use 'em on, their hands won't hold 'em. When we reach land we may need those tools to build a better boat."

Nobody answered. We were too intent on the long swells rolling towards us—on waiting for the large one, the third wave, after which we might expect two rollers that would be less troublesome.

The captain raised his hand and shouted, "Now!"

"Push her in," Langman cried. He dropped the hammer and axe in the stern, bawled at the captain to get aboard, and signalled Neal to climb in as well.

She slipped easily over the thick layer of seaweed we had spread beneath her. Her bow floated and rose up. Even with the canvas strip above her sides, she had only eighteen inches freeboard.

We waded in with her, up to our knees, up to our middles. The shock of the water on my feet and legs was indescribable.

Captain Dean, looking seaward, waved his arms wildly. "Hold her!" he screamed. "Back her!"

Ahead of the boat I saw a long swell moving in from the south. On its crest were the heads of a dozen seals, all staring down at me. They slipped away down the far side, and the wave came on.

"Pull her back!" Captain Dean cried. "Pull!"

The boat was sluggish and immovable in my hands, and the icy water round my middle drove the wind from me. I had no strength to pull.

I felt her rising and rising. I caught her gunnel to rise with her. She turned sideways and loomed before my face. I saw Captain Dean and Neal slide down against the gunnel, with oars tumbling all round them. I made a despairing clutch at the axe, caught among the oars.

Then the wave broke, the boat turned over and above me, and I was buried in a choking smother of foam.

This was the end of it! Our precious axe was lost again; the hammer as well; all the oakum we had picked so endlessly; all the oars that had tortured us; all the planks and boards so painfully and hopefully pieced together; the stanchions, the canvas, the nails and spikes so arduously assembled! Everything was gone—everything but life itself.

*December 22nd, Friday*

OUR CLOTHES froze that night, though we lay close together. After we were bedded in our nest of dank oakum, Swede came in alone. "She's gone," he said. "Lock, stock and barrel. I tried to hold her, but the tide pulled her out and the waves broke her into a tangle. She floated off to the south." He hunted for Neal and wedged himself down beside him. "It's started to snow," he said. "Thick: from the south. You couldn't have made it!"

WITH THE coming of daylight Swede pulled himself to the tent-flap. "The snow's stopped," he said, "but the whole world's plastered with it. It's got to be scraped off the tent."

"Why has it?" Langman asked. "Don't Eskimos make houses out of snow? Snow on the tent will protect us from wind."

Swede rolled over clumsily to look at Langman. "Langman," he said, "you're a whorson, beetle-headed, flap-ear'd knave! You're against everyone and everything, and you keep straight on telling lies to try to prove you're right. If we leave the snow on the tent and get more snow, the canvas will split, or it'll fall down on us. Snow's heavy! And you talk about Eskimos!"

"Eskimos *do* live under snow," Langman said defensively.

"They live in ice huts," Swede snapped. "And they have fur clothes and fire—and tools. We've got none! Thanks to you we've no tools."

Captain Dean got heavily to his feet. "Now, now!" he said. "We've got to live together. And Swede's right. We'll have to scrape the snow off the tent. If we do, maybe those on shore will see the tent and the flag against the snow."

"I don't believe it," Swede said bitterly. "If those ashore had their eyes open, they'd have seen this tent and flag-pole long before now. They're probably like most of the farmers where I come from—spend half their lives walking round with their heads hanging and their mouths open."

"I say with all this snow, we ought to stay in the tent," Langman said. "We're all half frozen. We'll slip and break our legs."

"No," Captain Dean said. "That's exactly why we can't stay in the tent. We're more than half frozen, and unless we keep moving, we *will* freeze."

"If they want to freeze," Swede said, "let 'em! They'd probably be more help to us dead than alive!"

LATER in the day Swede and Neal dragged the tattered remains of two hammocks into the tent. "Look at these hammocks," Swede said proudly. "Just what we need for a raft."

A groan went up from the circle of scarecrows huddled in the tent. "Swede," Captain Dean said, "there's plenty of time to discuss a raft."

"Oh no, there isn't," Swede said. "I've already lost the use of my feet. I'm building a raft while I've got my hands."

"On a raft," Captain Dean said, "a part of you would be in the water most of the time—all the time maybe. How long would you last in water like this?"

"I don't know," Swede said, "but I prayed to God yesterday while I was trying to hold the boat. I prayed again this morning. I prayed to Langman's God, whose Sunday is Saturday, and to our God, whose Sunday is Sunday—to Langman's God, who wants us to observe Christmas the day before Christmas, and to our God, who doesn't care when we observe it, so long as we celebrate it with an understanding of what Christmas means. Both Gods told me what to do. They told me to build a raft."

I realized suddenly what Swede was saying. He was saying that God gave His only beloved son to save the world from itself. Now Swede,

having communed with that God, was willing to give himself in order to save *his* only beloved son from a cruel and lingering death. He was not only willing to give himself; he had, in his mind, already done so.

*December 23rd, Saturday*

**T**HIS was the day of the sea-gull—a Langman Sunday, the day before Langman's Christmas, and the day we started the raft.

In making the boat we had deliberately ignored the foremast yard, not only because its twenty-four-foot length made it a veritable tree, but also because it was so tangled and cluttered with innumerable attachments—stays, lanyards, bridles, lifts, yard tackles—that by general agreement it had been spurned.

Now there were eight of us working at that spar, and we must have looked like hairy bears, nosing at a log in hungry curiosity. The twisted cordage resisted my knife blade like strands of metal. "Take it a strand at a time," the captain said. "Wriggle your knife blade under a single strand: then drag the blade towards your stomach."

Langman came from the tent to watch us.

"Get your knife and go to work," Captain Dean said.

"It's Sunday," Langman said. "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."

"It's Saturday," Captain Dean said. "What excuse will you have tomorrow for not working?"

"Tomorrow's Christmas," Langman said, almost indulgently.

He seemed disappointed when the men made no reply. Langman had to have attention, and he didn't care how he got it.

GRADUALLY we gained on the cordage and junk, half numbed by the monotonous clack, clack, clack of Swede's rock as he rapped it against the knife-blade that Neal clutched in place of a chisel.

Suddenly shrill through the noise of the breakers came a raucous screaming that brought us all to our feet. Against the dark background of the seaweed-covered ledges we saw a preposterous mixture of man and wings that gyrated and flapped and rolled about.

"It's Langman," Captain Dean said. "He's caught a sea-gull!"







He had indeed, or the sea-gull had caught him, for the big bird was screaming, squalling, flapping its wings, beating Langman's head with giant pinions. I thought for a moment that the gull had lifted him from the rock. But it fell at last and Langman leaped upon it. The gull ceased to flap and flop, and lay still.

The air above the man and the struggling bird had been alive with gulls, wheeling, squealing and wailing; but when the bird was quiet, every single one of those gulls fell silent and winged off towards the mainland as if terror-stricken. There was something oppressive about their sudden departure.

Langman came slowly back to us, dragging that huge bird across the icy ledges, and threw it down beside the spar.

"There!" Langman said. "There's some food that's better than mussels!" He was proud of himself, and with good reason.

We crowded round that enormous gull, fondling it, burying our fingers in its beautiful warm white breast, and sniffing its dusty clean smell. It was a black-back—snowy white on belly, head, neck and tail, but with black wings and a black saddle: largest of all gulls; almost double the size of ordinary gulls with pale blue backs: nearly three times that of young grey ones.

"I'll skin him," Langman said importantly, "and we'll eat him. I wish you could have seen how I got him. I cut enough seaweed to cover me, and then I raked up a mussel and put it on a flat place, just near the hole I'd picked to squat in. Then I hung the seaweed all over me, so that I looked like a boulder. When that old gull came overhead, twisting his neck and squinting at that mussel from all sides, he looked as big as a goose! Then he struck out his feet and came down all sprawling, a regular ostrich, and I just put out my hand and grabbed him. That was the surprisedest gull that ever landed on *this* island!"

For a moment I almost liked Langman. For a moment, but only for a moment, I forgot that the leopard never changes his spots.

Langman skinned that gull with loving care, making an incision at the top of the head and running the cut all the way down the centre of the back to the tail.

"We can make ear muffs with this," he said as he worked. "We can fasten feather pads inside spun-yarn caps, so that those who go out on

patrol can have better protection. We can make a pair of feather-lined gauntlets and take turns wearing 'em."

THE DIVISION of that bird's body among thirteen men wasn't easy, and I was glad Langman turned over the task to Captain Dean. The men watched him divide the carcass, each one certain, after the manner of hungry men, that his was the smallest portion. The rest of the bird the captain placed on a board to freeze.

Chips Bullock wouldn't come from the tent, even for meat, so the captain called for Neal to take Chips's portion to him.

Langman was derisive. "I suppose," he said, "you don't trust any of the rest of us to take that to Chips."

"I don't even trust myself," the captain said.

### *December 24th, Sunday*

LANGMAN, inflamed by his success in capturing the sea-gull, was at us all Sunday to celebrate that day as Christmas. Swede, equally determined to keep on with the raft while the weather was endurable, spoke to him sharply. "I'm not going to have any first mate telling me how to celebrate the birth of Christ, or when to do it. When the proper time arrives, I'll celebrate Christmas in my own way."

Captain Dean turned to me. "Miles, you were in Christ Church. You must have heard talk about the celebrating of Christmas."

"Yes, sir, and my father and I often talked about it. He said it should be a festival for children and for the poor—not a time for people to cripple themselves financially by exchanging expensive gifts that most givers can't afford and most recipients don't want. He said Christ would be the first one to pity those who can't decide which day to celebrate, and to laugh at those who, because of politics, say how it shall be celebrated."

"You're against Christmas!" Langman said. "That's blasphemy!"

"No, it's not," I said. "Every don in Christ Church knows that the Puritans by Act of Parliament forbade merriment or religious services on Christmas. They said it was a heathen festival. Charles the Second revived feasting on Christmas. That's politics."

"Anyway, the date has always been the same," Langman insisted.

"That's not so," I told him. "I've heard professors lecture on it. Some of the ancients said Christ's birthday was May twentieth: others said April nineteenth: still others put it on the seventeenth of November. One man held out for the twenty-eighth of March. Then January sixth was celebrated as His birthday for hundreds of years."

"I say this is Christmas," Langman persisted, "and the rest of my sea-gull should be divided for a feast."

"All right," Captain Dean agreed. "Go ahead and divide it up. You'd better give Swede at least half the neck. He seems to be doing most of the work on the raft."

THE JUNK was completely stripped from the spar that Sunday by noon when Langman summoned us to the tent to partake of the last of the sea-gull at what he persisted in calling our Christmas dinner.

That afternoon, when our cutlass-saw had chewed its way half through the spar, we lifted it and banged it against the edge of a ledge. By the grace of God it cracked and split; so that when four of us took one end and four took the other, and we put our weight on it, it broke all the way across—jaggedly, it's true; but it broke.

So when we crawled into the tent for the last time on that false Christmas, the two pieces of spar lay side by side on the flat ledge, ready to be joined together in a raft—though my half-frozen brain was incapable of sensing how it could ever be done.

### *December 25th, Monday*

CHRISTMAS ON Boon Island!

I write the words reluctantly because they deny each other. They're unreal and don't belong together. Christmas belongs with warmth, with love, with good cheer, with feasting, with happiness, with gratitude for years past and years to come, with an understanding of the meaning of Christmas. . . .

There were spittings of snow and a north-west wind that drove snow dust beneath the tent and through every crevice, no matter how solidly we packed oakum along the tent-bottom. Outside the wind cut like a

knife. The captain took the skin of the sea-gull's breast, now dry, and stretched it over his knees and stroked it.

"It's a shame to cut that breast," Swede said. "We could make a whole helmet out of it."

"Only a helmet for one man," the captain reminded him.

Taking the skin, Neal pressed it tight over his head. He was the only one among us who didn't have a grizzled beard; and his face, beneath that soft, white gull-breast, with the black wings hanging down on either side, reminded me poignantly of how he had looked on the stage at Greenwich, reciting Cibber's epilogue. He lifted the gull-breast from his head and studied it. "You could run yarn through the large part of each wing," he said, "and tie one over each ear."

In the end we used the black shoulder feathers to pad our clumsy mittens. The beautiful white breast, after long discussion and the drawing of diagrams on the skin with the points of knives, we cut into strips long enough to pass from ear to ear across the nose. All that Christmas morning we wove and patched our oakum headgear and mittens with those strips of sea-gull skin. There were enough to make five feather-lined helmets that would let five men work on the raft, after a fashion, despite the cruel wind.

WE HAD no hammer: no spikes: no nails. We had to build the body of our raft out of four lengths of plank that Swede and Neal had somehow worried from the junk the day before. All we had to fasten the planks to our two spars was rope.

The captain showed us how to thread cordage beneath the two pieces of spar in such a way that the pieces were four feet apart; then bring the ends of each piece of cordage together and splice them. Thus the spars were joined loosely by a series of rope loops, into which we thrust our planks. Spun yarn was knotted from side to side of the loop and between the planks to prevent them from folding against each other, and then tightened, as is a tourniquet, with a stick.

When any of us reached the limit of his endurance, which was often, he told Swede, who went back to the tent with him, helped him relinquish his feathered headgear to another, who crawled reluctantly into that whistling, spume-laden blast. Swede was the only one who

had faith in what we were doing. The rest of us were helping him rather than ourselves.

By dark that Christmas Day the planks were finally laced tightly. When even Swede was willing to stop, and went from one of us to the other, patting our backs and thanking us for the work we'd done, I had a momentary thought that Christmas was truly Christmas, even on Boon Island.

*December 26th, Tuesday*

OUR LIVES depended on the weather, and if that north-west wind had blown another day, if for another twenty-four hours the combers, each one whitecapped, had raced at us and all round us, steaming and smoking, as the sea always does in frigid spells, I think our hopes would have been dashed.

But on the day after our true Christmas, the weather moderated.

I may seem to speak overmuch about the weather, but weather was our life. City dwellers, who despise sailors and countrymen, can never, in their restricted world, know the marvels that exist in the worlds of others, or appreciate the magic qualities of all the things they look upon as commonplace: the wonders of fire, of sweet water, of shelter. To one who has been exposed to the ocean and its winter furies, the words "the weather moderated" bring inexpressible relief—a surcease from agony, from despair, from dark depression. . . .

And so, to our joy, the weather moderated! The wind, what there was of it, couldn't make up its mind what to do. It blew gently from the east: then came fitfully from the west.

Swede, working at the pile of junk for materials to strengthen his raft, nosed at these breezes like a weather-vane. He was afraid, and so were the rest of us, that the wind would back up—move to the west and south without first going to the eastward and the south-east. When, after a storm or a blow, the wind backs up, unpleasant weather will soon return, just as some sort of evil follows the appearance of a ring round sun or moon.

We stepped a fence post of a mast on the raft and hung the two hammocks on it, to serve as a sort of double lugsail. "We can lay two

piles of cordage, bow and stern, and lace them in position," Swede told Captain Dean. "That'll keep us out of the water. They ought to be big enough so we can kneel on them."

"Who's we?" Captain Dean asked. "You and who else?"

"I don't know," Swede said. "The Lord will provide."

The captain shook his head and let his eyes wander round the horizon as if in hopes of finding the something that the Lord would provide. He studied the tall rusty face of Bald Head Cliff, the long sands of York and so round to the open sea beyond Cape Neddick. Then he straightened, as if incredulous.

"Why," he said, "there's a sail! There's *two* of 'em!"

He raised his voice shouting, "Sail! Sail!"

We dropped our armfuls of cordage. We got ourselves to the highest part of the rock and stared longingly at those two far-off sails. We could hardly see their hulls, but our unreasoning longing to be rescued was so strong that we shouted and waved, waved and shouted—all of us but Swede.

"You think I haven't got a chance to reach shore on this raft," he said, "yet you go shouting and waving at two sloops that are fifteen miles away if they're an inch."

I had to admit that he was right, and that in shouting and waving at those two far-off sails we were close to panic. Yet the sight of those sails, and our shouting and our waving, had done something to our spirits so that when we had finished the raft and gone to the tent to eat our seaweed and ice, we were more hopeful about Swede's venture than we had hitherto been.

*December 27th, Wednesday*

TRUE LOVE is, I suppose, always intemperate, whether it's the love of a man for a woman, or a parent for a child. Certainly Swede's love for Neal was a consuming passion, and Neal's comprehension of that love was unusual and beautiful.

Even before sun-up Swede had left the tent, and Neal with him. I couldn't hear what Swede said to Neal, but there was a buoyant quality in his voice. When I went outside, I found the wind had dropped to

a dead calm; the air was still but frost-laden. There was ice on the naked boulders—spume ice left by the north-west wind. And the sea—ah, that damnable sea, perpetually heaving, surging, on every side, as if afflicted with waves of nausea!

I went over to the raft on which Swede and Neal were sitting, lashing two oars to the sides with spun yarn.

"I know the signs," Swede said cheerfully. "That wind's coming round. When the tide's low at one o'clock, she'll move in from the south. No doubt about it."

The captain and George White crawled from the tent just as the sun came up. Against its rising disk the rollers on the horizon were like the teeth of our cutlass-saw.

"Well, Captain," Swede said triumphantly, "this is the day! Full moon! Onshore wind!"

The captain shook his head and with his oakum-swathed hands dragged at that spider-web of a raft. "I ought to forbid you to go," he said. "The chances of your getting ashore alive with this raft aren't as good as staying alive on this rock. We saw two sails yesterday. There's bound to be others out of Portsmouth or Cape Porpoise or York."

Swede put his arm round Neal's shoulders. "Captain, I'm leaving here at low tide. You'll help me put her in over yonder, where those ledges point out to the west, won't you?"

I was watching Neal. His eyes lifted suddenly, met mine and instantly dropped again. They looked hurt, like the eyes of a dog whose master is deserting him.

"Help me get seaweed, Neal," I said.

He climbed obediently from the raft, and as he went, his father's fist rapped him affectionately on the shoulder. We started the hated circuit of the island.

"Neal," I asked, "has your father ever told you he'd like you to go with him on the raft?"

Neal shook his head. "He wouldn't let me. I said I'd go, but he almost snapped my ears off."

"He'll never make it," I said. "Have you asked him not to go?"

"No," Neal admitted. "He *wants* to go. He's *determined* to go."



"Yes," I said, "I can see that."

"He *might* make it," Neal said, "if he had an onshore wind and a strong man to use the paddle. Anyway, nothing can stop him." When I was silent, Neal added, "When he was in the Naval Hospital, he thought he wasn't pulling his weight, and he was ashamed to be seen in the hospital uniform. On the *Nottingham* he pulled his weight. He was happy again. He was even happy on this island—until his feet froze. Then he couldn't pull his weight any more. He thinks this raft'll let him pull his weight."

"Not if he doesn't get ashore," I reminded him.

"He doesn't look at it that way," Neal said. "He says everything's in his favour. He says even if he doesn't get to land and the raft does, they'll find the raft—and then they'll find us."

"You wouldn't stop him if you could, would you?" I asked.

"No, I wouldn't," Neal said. "If he let me or anybody or anything stop him, he'd never forgive himself. He knows he's going to die, and so do I. I don't want him to die unhappy."

There wasn't anything I could say to that. Neal, when I'd first encountered him in Greenwich, was a fine boy—the sort of boy anyone would be proud to have as a son or a brother; but the things that had happened to him in five months had changed him from a boy into a man—a man who would be a credit to any society, to any country, no matter along what lines his life might be cast.

SWEDE was right about the wind. At noon it moved faintly, a little east of south, and the captain gave the word to drag the raft to the spot Swede had chosen. The dragging wasn't easy. Swede counted for us—"One, two, three, hup"—and at the "hup" we'd all lift together—sliding the raft forward three inches, five inches. At the water's edge the captain stepped back.

"Put her in," Swede shouted. "She's headed right for shore!"

"Yes, put her in," George White said. "I'm going with him. With this breeze I think we can make it."

"If you're determined to go," the captain said, "I won't try to stop you, but I want to urge you to wait one or two more days."

"What for?" Swede demanded. "Push her in."



The captain fumbled in his clothes and produced coins, which he gave to Swede. "These are all I saved," he told him. "They may help you. Just one thing, Swede. When you get to shore, get somebody to light two fires on the beach, before they do anything else."

"Two fires," Swede said. He crawled aboard the raft and swept us with a glance that made my heart contract. "I know you wish us well," he said. "I wish all of you well." He steadied himself by grasping the spar on either side, and we ran the raft into the water. George White climbed over the stern, and we pushed as hard as we could.

The raft moved heavily between two ledge-fingers, and her hammock-sail flapped. She moved out until she was parallel with the tips of the ledge-fingers: then sluggishly swung broadside to the distant coastline. A slow surge moved her forward. The bow rose a little. The surge slid back and left the side of the raft caught on an unseen ledge. Her free side slipped under water, and she tilted sharply. The surge returned and the raft rolled over. A crying rose round us like the squalling of sea-gulls above a school of fish.

Swede came to the surface, gasping, and swam easily to shore, holding a rope-end in his hand. Neal and Langman dragged him up on the seaweed. I saw the captain, at the end of a ledge-finger, clutching for the oar freed from its lashing by White before the raft had spilt. He pulled in the oar with White clinging to it, and held him, doubled over, by the waist.

Hauling at the rope-end Swede had brought in, we got the overturned raft ashore at the spot from which we had launched her.

"Turn her right side up!" Swede gasped.

"You can't make it, Swede," the captain said. "White's finished. He's full of sea water. He's sick!"

"I'll go alone," Swede said wildly. "I've got to go!"

"You can't go, you fool," Langman said. "It'll be dark before you make land. You'll freeze in those wet clothes. It's too late."

"It's not too late," Swede cried. "We'll never get a brighter night than tonight—full moon, onshore breeze! Make 'em turn it over, Captain!"

"Not if you're going alone," Captain Dean said.

Swede, on his knees, caught the captain's hand. "Don't do it for

*me!*" he implored. "Do it for these others!" He swung an oakum-swathed hand in a semicircle to include all those stooped, bearded, wild-looking creatures. I was afraid to look among them for Neal.

Harry Hallion shuffled across the slippery seaweed to stand beside Swede and the captain. "I'll go with him," he told the captain. "I can swim. White couldn't. If Swede feels the way he does, I think we can make it."

The captain eyed him dubiously.

"Anything's better than this," Hallion said. "You're wasting time. Get her turned over for us."

Captain Dean motioned to us and we helped him turn the raft right side up. "Push her in!" Swede shouted. "We don't need a sail! Get her in before the tide turns!"

We slid her into the water. Swede and Hallion were at their places. A swell from the south raised her. Miraculously she slipped down it, towards the mouth of the little cove. A cross-swell from the north pushed her to the west and she cleared the mouth of the cove, Swede and Hallion thrashing the water with their makeshift oars: the mast and sails were gone. Behind me someone prayed, the same incoherent prayer that had risen so often to my own lips—Oh God Oh God Oh God Oh God . . .

I felt sick all over at the smallness of that miserable raft, the cold immensity of that heaving ocean, the far far frosty distance over which the raft must float, the seeming pitifulness of those two human specks—yet who was to feel sick when those two specks were in truth, and unknown to themselves, great in spirit, and therefore happy!

There was distance and haziness between the raft and Boon Island when Swede turned, raised his oar and waved it. I looked for Neal. He wasn't among those who knelt on ledges or clung to boulders, following the slow movement of the raft with straining eyes, urging it on, urging it on.

I got myself back to the tent. Neal was sitting beside Chips Bullock, holding one of Chips's hands in both of his.

"He was alive when I came in," Neal said. "He held out his hand to me and I took it. He didn't say anything, but his eyes asked. I told him about the raft. I think it made him feel better."

Chips's eyes were closed. His face was peaceful, and I was glad he was gone. He hadn't died alone; he had had someone to speak to him.

There was coming and going in the tent. At dusk, the captain said, the raft seemed to be half-way to land. Sometimes it would go from sight: then rise again on a wave. Nobody talked about it. We were exhausted. Also about high-tide time, the wind rose and howled round the tent and through its many chinks, and the roaring seas made words an agony to men more dead than alive.

*December 28th, Thursday*

I THINK that when Captain Dean called me from the tent at dawn on the day after Swede and Hallion had gone off on the raft, and Chips Bullock had died, he knew what that day would bring forth, and I think he was struggling desperately to find the inner strength to face it.

Captain Dean was what is known as civilized. He recognized and detested the bad days that selfish and greedy men, gambling, bad laws and worse law enforcement had brought upon England. On Boon Island he had willingly done physical things that those beneath him hadn't the moral strength to do. He had endured without anger the cowardice of Saver and Graystock: the helplessness of his own brother: the malicious opposition of Langman, White and Mellen. He had ventured out into the black cold of midnight in the hope of catching a seal unaware. He had washed our ulcerated legs and feet: persuaded his unwilling crew to pick oakum for their own protection: almost paralysed his hands to dredge up mussels for us; and now I think he foresaw that a worse trial was upon him—one that would require him to ignore standards that civilization builds up within a decent man.

As I crawled from the tent, Captain Dean stopped to speak to the men inside. "Mr. Whitworth and I will walk the shore as fast as we're able," he said, "I want you to drag out Chips's body to the ledge nearest the tent. When we come back, we'll all say a prayer over it and roll it into the water."

We made our slow circuit of the island, watching for floating objects or anything usable cast up by the sea. There was nothing in sight—

nothing except the seals that reared head and shoulders from the waves to follow our every movement with insatiable curiosity: little black and white sea swallows, skittering from wave to wave with limp feet trailing, and everywhere an infinity of sea-ducks, swimming in vast shoals; chunky round black ones with white cheeks: little slender brown ones with bristly combs, diligently raising pointed beaks to heaven and genuflecting to each other—and all complacently ignoring us.

Our rounds completed, the captain peered intently towards the distant mainland, then glanced towards the tent.

"They haven't done as I told 'em," he said. "They haven't taken him out."

When I didn't answer, he said, "Go in yourself, Miles. I can't allow them to disobey orders like this."

I went to the tent and pulled aside the flap. When I had crawled out, they were lying down, huddled together, as motionless as Chips Bullock. Now only Chips lay there. The others, even Saver and Graystock, were sitting up. I sensed a feverish excitement.

"Why didn't you take Chips out?" I asked.

"We haven't the strength," Langman said. "We're weak from lack of food."

I looked from one to another. Neal crawled out from among them and stood beside me: "They want to eat him," he said. "They're afraid to ask the captain. They want you to do it."

"I never said any such thing!" Langman said. "I'd never eat a fellow creature."

"We'll get mussels for you at low tide," I reminded them.

"Mussels!" Henry Dean exclaimed. "I gag whenever I try to swallow one!"

"Look, Whitworth," Graystock said, "those mussels make every single one of us sick! Ask the captain to let us have Chips. There's no use wasting him, the way we wasted Cooky!"

Well, there was no use lying to myself. When the captain had rolled Cooky into the sea, I'd almost protested—almost, but I hadn't quite dared. Now I stood looking from them to the body of Chips Bullock. I had no feeling at all except pity for Captain Dean.

When he came in among us I said, "Captain, these people want to eat Chips Bullock."

"Not me!" Langman said.

"Captain," I said, "we ate a sea-gull last week. Mr. Langman ate a mouthful of it, like the rest of us."

"What's that got to do with it?" Langman asked sharply.

"Gulls are scavengers," I said. "They eat anything dead. The one we ate might have eaten part of Cooky Sipper."

"Everyone in England eats eels," Christopher Gray said. "Eels are worse than sea-gulls, but who cares?"

"You'll never catch me eating the body of a fellow human," Langman said. "My conscience would never let me rest."

"You've already got more on your conscience than any one man should be called on to endure," Captain Dean said.

"Eating a man would be a sin," Langman protested. "If I agreed to it, I'd be damned for ever."

"It's a terrible thing," Captain Dean agreed. "But in my opinion it's not as much of a sin as swearing to a lie that robs a man of his good name. You've lied about the insurance my brother and I carried on the *Nottingham*. You lied when you said I purposely ran the *Nottingham* ashore. I think you're damned already."

Langman eyed the captain sourly.

"Captain," Christopher Gray said, "Hallion lived with Indians in Nova Scotia, and Hallion said that when one Indian killed another in battle, he ate the dead Indian's heart. Hallion said Indians thought it gave 'em courage."

"We could use a few Indians' hearts on Boon Island," Captain Dean said. "I think all of us could! We've lost the only one who didn't need to eat an Indian's heart . . . Swede Butler."

"Are you accusing us of cowardice?" Langman asked.

"Mr. Langman," the captain said, "I ordered you and George White to drag Chips Bullock's body to the ledge nearest the sea. Why didn't you do it?"

"I told Mr. Whitworth," Langman said. "We're too weak."

"If you're too weak to do that, you're weak from hunger. And if you're hungry enough, you'll eat anything. I think you didn't move

Chips because you secretly wanted to eat him but lacked the courage to say so."

"I'll never eat a fellow human," Langman repeated.

"We'll vote," Captain Dean said. "We'll vote whether or not we'll eat this body. Neal, you're youngest, but you won't vote until after all the others."

"I want to vote," Neal said. "My father would have voted Yes, and that's how I vote."

"Mr. Langman?" asked the captain.

"Never shall it be——"

"All right," the captain said. "You vote No. Christopher Gray?"

"I vote Yes," Gray said. "Captain, we're almost dead now."

"Henry Dean?" the captain asked.

"Yes," his brother said.

"Charles Graystock?" the captain asked. "I'm in no doubt about you or Saver."

"Yes!" Graystock shouted; and Saver said "Yes" in strong, firm tones.

"Now let's see," the captain said, "that's five in favour. That only leaves three to vote—Whitworth, George White, Nicholas Mellen. So there's no need to vote further."

"What about you?" Langman asked.

The captain ignored him, and I knew why. The captain didn't want to vote Yes; but if he had, Langman, at the first opportunity, would have taken oath that the eating of Chips Bullock had been done at the captain's suggestion. He might even have implied that the captain killed Chips in order to eat him. That was the sort of person Langman was. Unfortunately there'll always be Langmans in this world, to set people and nations against each other—to spread sly rumours and spit on the truth.

THE CAPTAIN himself handled the grim business at hand. Neal and I helped him drag out the body—nothing would persuade the others to take even this part in the act they'd begged the captain to permit. When the body lay on the cold ledge, the captain turned to us.

"Now," he said, "I want the two of you to go to the north side of

the island. See whether anything's come ashore. Look at the mainland for signs of boats. I've got things to do, and I'm reconciled to doing them. What has to be done, I'll do alone. You aren't reconciled yet; and what I'm doing, I'm doing for your father's sake as well as for your own."

WHEN THE captain returned, exhausted and depressed, to the tent to feed those comrades who had lain there sunk in helplessness, Langman, White and Mellen refused to eat.

"An insult," Langman mumbled, "to the spirit of a friend."

"Langman," Captain Dean said, "what I am offering is nobody's spirit. It's beef. It was animated once by a soul and a spirit, but the soul and the spirit have gone, leaving only beef behind."

Boon Island taught me that no man should ever say: "Nothing could persuade me to do this; nothing could make me do that."

I expected to be revolted by my meal, but I wasn't. All I could think of was Langman, meatless, staring out from the darkness with hard and hating eyes, and once I thought I felt Chips Bullock behind me, a little stooped, his head lowered, laughing that silent, belly-shaking laugh of his at Langman, Mellen and White.

### *December 29th, Friday*

THE WIND had threatened us by backing up on Thursday. On Friday that threat materialized. Shortly after midnight a mixture of snow and rain from the south-west slatted against the tent; dribblets of water trickled down upon us, first from one spot and then from another. Even before daybreak the men, restless, were demanding meat.

"You'll get your ration," Captain Dean assured them, "but I made up my mind to something yesterday, when able-bodied men lay here and pretended to be too weak to lift a hand, then ate with the strength of wolves. This is what I decided. If they've got the strength to eat meat, they had the strength, yesterday, to do the necessary work to provide it. They wouldn't do it! I'm sick of people who won't help themselves."

Nobody said anything.

"So," Captain Dean said, "let's see where we stand. Mr. Langman's



conscience won't let him eat human flesh. Neither will White's nor Mellen's. That leaves seven of us. All seven will draw a reasonable ration this morning, but each one of us must do something in return, and that's pick enough oakum to thatch this tent. That means Saver and Graystock will pick oakum or get no meat. It means my brother will pick oakum, even though he *does* have epileptic fits once in a while. It means I'll pick oakum, Mr. Whitworth will pick oakum. So will Neal Butler and Christopher Gray. Each one of you must swear that if he eats meat, he'll pick oakum as long as he can move his hands. Saver, do you solemnly swear you'll pick oakum with the rest of us?"

Saver said he did, as did Graystock and the other four of us.

"All right," Captain Dean said. "I expect every one of you to live up to your promises. If you don't, I'll take steps."

He went to the tent-flap and peered out into the storm.

Langman got to his feet and moved close to the captain. "Captain," he said, "we've changed our minds about the beef. When we understood it was beef, we saw we'd made a mistake."

The captain looked at him incredulously. "How did you persuade your consciences to accept this as beef?"

"Why," Langman said, "we just told our consciences it was beef. For a while our consciences wouldn't listen, but in the end they did. I almost woke you up in the middle of the night to tell you our consciences had stopped bothering us."

"Well, I'm glad to hear it," Captain Dean said, "but there's two or three other little things that your consciences will have to consider before we admit you to our society. In the first place, you have to give us your word that you'll pick oakum for thatching the tent." All three men gave their word quickly. Captain Dean seemed pleased. "There are two other things," he said. "One is the matter of Sunday. It's of small moment to me what day of the week a man worships his God, but if he arbitrarily picks a Sunday that differs from the one we celebrate, he creates unrest, and we have all the unrest we need without creating more. Your Sunday, Langman, is an irritation. Do you think you can persuade your conscience to accept our Sunday?"

"All right," Langman said. "Tomorrow's Sunday, but I can worship on the day you do."



The captain looked as genial as a dirty, tired, whiskered man could look. "Langman," he said, "yesterday you were offered a fair share of all we had, and with no strings attached. But you made a show of yourself by refusing to take what we offered. You weren't honest about it. Now, you'll have to pay a penalty for past dishonesty: you'll have to be honest with us."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Langman said.

"If you don't, you're weak-minded," Captain Dean said, "and that's the last thing I'd accuse you of. You said repeatedly I ran the ship ashore purposely, and that's the stupidest, silliest piece of mental dishonesty I ever heard."

Langman widened his eyes at the captain. "If that's all that's bothering you," he said, "I'll trade my opinion for the same ration that everyone else gets."

"That is to say," Captain Dean said, "you give me your word you won't repeat that outrageous lie, ever again."

"Why, of course," Langman said, all mealy-mouthed.

The captain went out into the snow, and Langman looked round at the rest of us with his lip lifted in that sardonic smile of his. I thought I knew the meaning of that offensive smile. Unless I misjudged Langman, no promise of his was worth anything at all.

WHILE we picked cordage apart and made it into oakum, the captain wove it. By dark that Friday he had woven a thatch of oakum that covered the top of the tent and extended two-thirds down the south-eastern side.

So thanks to Chips Bullock and to Langman's slippery conscience, we were not only fed but were free, all night long, of the rivulets of icy water that had dripped upon us through that snowy, rainy day.

*December 30th, Saturday*

"GET somebody to light two fires on the beach," Captain Dean had told Swede before he set off on the raft; and for days our minds were centred on hunting for smoke on the mainland. Because of Friday's rain and snow, we couldn't see Bald Head Cliff or the beaches;

but on Saturday the snow and rain stopped, and land was once more visible—a savage land of dark pines, long sands, forbidding surf, with no trace of smoke discernible anywhere.

Neal was out of the tent at dawn, studying that shore-line. We did what we could to buoy up his hopes—and ours, too.

"Yesterday was so rainy," Captain Dean said, "that there wouldn't have been dry wood on the beach."

Neal glanced at him, and the captain looked away.

"They might have had to go far before they found a house," I said. "Two or three days might pass before fires could be lit."

Neal didn't reply. He just crept back into the tent and started on picking oakum.

I don't know what happens to the minds of prisoners or other men in circumstances such as ours; but I suspect they move more and more slowly, until they scarcely move at all. If that weren't so—if their minds worked actively on their situations—their lives would be unendurable and they'd die.

While there was a possibility of seeing smoke, we seemed content to sit and pick oakum: to wait until the next time someone went to the tent-flap to scan the land. We were like sleepers half awake.

Altercations broke out unexpectedly. When Langman gabbled something about "This day our daily bread," Christopher Gray, the gunner, flew at him.

"What do you want to talk that way for?" Gray demanded.

"What way?" Langman asked.

"You said 'This day,'" Gray said. "That means that this day's Sunday, but you know it ain't."

"I never said today was Sunday," Langman said.

"You said 'This day.' 'This day' means Sunday."

"I never did," Langman said, "and if I did, 'This day' can be *any* day."

Gray, enraged, lunged at him, and they thrashed ineffectually around our odoriferous oakum floor. We caught Gray and set him upright. Forgetting Langman, he again picked numbly at the hemp before him.

I pulled at Neal's sleeve, and we went out on the rock. We looked all along the coast for smoke.

"Neal," I said, "it might help these men if you recited parts of plays to them. It might keep them quiet."

Neal shook his head. "Nothing would keep them quiet. Anyway, I've forgotten everything. I don't want to remember, and I never will. I want to forget my name even. I want it to be what it should be—Moses. That's what my father and my mother called me. If I'd never gone near the theatre, the *Nottingham* wouldn't have sailed when she did. She'd never have struck this island. It's all my fault."

"Look, Neal," I said. "If you want to start thinking that way, every bad thing in the world can be traced back to some little incident that nobody was to blame for. Instead of blaming yourself, blame the circumstances that brought that nasty little fop to Greenwich."

But Neal's eyes had a hunted look. I think if there'd been a hole on that barren rock into which he could have crawled, he'd have crept there to get away from me, from Captain Dean, from his memories, from the eternal thundering of the breakers all round us.

### *December 31st, Sunday*

IF A MAN, on the last day of any year, chooses honestly to consider his shortcomings, he must always be depressed; and if any people anywhere ever had occasion to be downcast on the last day of that year, it was we on Boon Island.

The whole night was a bad one. First Henry Dean screamed his horrible epileptic's scream in the deep dark, and flung himself about as though he had eight legs and arms, all made of steel. When we finally pinned him down, he twisted and turned with almost unbelievable violence, and groaned horribly, and there's something catching—something poisonous—about groans. After Henry Dean had fallen into an epileptic's heavy sleep, I lay staring upward, afraid of the dark, afraid of what must happen to my feet and legs if this cold continued—if we went on and on being drenched daily by the salty spit from the breakers—if I lost the use of my hands and could no longer occupy myself in the brain-deadening task of picking oakum.

In my thinking I groaned, realized too late what I was doing, tried to turn it into a cough, and produced a sort of squawk.

I felt a hand fumbling at my shoulder and heard Neal say, "Are you all right, Miles?"

"Of course," I said. "Of course I'm all right. Are you all right?"

"We're *all* all right," Captain Dean said. "Even my brother's all right—or will be when he wakes. All of you felt how much strength he has. Just remember you're all as strong as Henry if only you make up your minds to be." He hesitated: then added, "I've been thinking. I don't believe we've been praying right. We've been praying as if we didn't know God at all—as if He was some sort of distant image, away up above the stars somewhere.

"Well, He isn't an image. He's real. And since we expect Him to answer our prayers, He can't be far away. We believe He'll help us if we deserve to be helped, but we don't ask Him for that help in the same way we'd ask our own fathers for help." He hesitated again. "Would anyone like to speak to God? If you can't find the words, I'll speak for you, but I think you might feel better if you did your own speaking."

"I'd like to speak to God," Neal said. "I'd like to speak about my father. God, I'd like to have my father told that I know what he did for us. You must know what he did, God, and I hope You won't let it be wasted."

"What do you mean by that, Neal?" the captain asked.

"God knows," Neal said.

After a time the captain spoke again, conversationally, as if God were in the tent with us. "God," he said, "You've been kind to us, though some might think You haven't been. By giving us ice to eat, You've saved us from the most horrible of all deaths. You've given us work to do, so that we've preserved our sanity. You let the sea wash up the cordage from which we made clothing and shelter. You gave us seaweed to eat. You gave us Swede Butler to strengthen our courage. . . ."

Langman spoke up. "Don't forget the sea-gull."

"Yes, God; the sea-gull," Captain Dean said. "The sea-gull helped us. All things considered, God, we've done as well with these blessings as any equal number of men could be expected to do, and all we ask, God, is that You don't withdraw Your favour from us."

"Aren't you going to ask for a ship to take us off?" Langman demanded. "Why don't you ask Him to send the sea-gulls back? There hasn't been one sighted since I killed mine!"

"Ask for fire!" White demanded.

The captain shook his head. "Ask for them yourselves if you think it'll do any good," he said. "If God feels we should be helped, I think He ought to be allowed to work it out in His own way. I don't feel qualified to tell God what to do or how to do it. I wouldn't feel justified in asking Him for more sea-gulls. He probably had a good reason for sending 'em away from the island."

I couldn't improve on what the captain had said, and the others were silent as well; but I think we all felt better because of Neal's and the captain's talks with God.

THERE WERE lines of light showing round the edges of the tent-flap when I went out with the captain.

"Was it three days ago," Captain Dean asked, "or four days ago that Swede and Hallion put off? I forget. Every day seems a year long."

"It was Wednesday," I said.

"Miles," he said slowly, "I think Neal knows his father's gone."

"I think so," I said. "I'm sure of it, and so are you."

"Yes," Captain Dean said, "but he knows more than we do." With seeming carelessness he added, "What is it Neal thinks happened to his father?"

"Well," I said, "you know how I feel about Neal. From the moment I saw him, I've thought of him as a brother—a younger brother. I wouldn't want you to think that there's anything odd about him—that he has hallucinations, or anything of that sort."

The captain sniffed. "I know hallucinations when I see 'em, Miles. The night the *Nottingham* was wrecked, I was sure none of us would last until morning. Then when morning came, I had a feeling. Not an hallucination. I had the feeling we were going to come safely out of this. I still have it, and I still think I'm right. That's no hallucination. Now, what is it that Neal feels about his father?"

"Well," I said, "he thinks he saw his father in a dream, or something like that. His father told him the raft hadn't a chance of getting

to shore with two men on it. He told Neal that since he was a good swimmer, he was going to take to the water and swim and push. He thought that if he did this, the raft might get to shore, so he was going to try it."

The captain nodded. "I see."

"Well, that's what Neal thinks, Captain. He thinks his father swam as long as he could, and then just slipped off."

"I can think of worse ways to go," the captain said.

*January 1st, Monday*

THIS was the day we saw the smoke.

Neal saw it first and was less affected by it than the rest of us. He reported it almost idly. "There's smoke on the mainland. It's blowing to the eastward."

We jostled each other to crawl from the tent to see it. What the smoke meant, we couldn't know, but Captain Dean insisted that it must be a signal to us: a sign our plight had been discovered. As near as we could tell, it was rising to the south of west, probably, the captain thought, from somewhere between York and Portsmouth.

Langman insisted it couldn't be a signal, because the fire was so far south of the direction in which the raft had been heading. "Why would anyone bother with a signal anyway?" he asked. "There's an offshore breeze, and only six or eight miles to go. Any sloop or schooner could sail that distance in less time than it took somebody to start that fire."

"I don't know," Captain Dean admitted, "but I know that raft got ashore. If it got ashore, somebody saw it. Anybody who saw it would recognize it as the work of seamen who had next to nothing to work with. Where else but on Boon Island would a lot of wrecked seamen have nothing to work with?"

All day long we argued the matter. At one moment we were elated in a firm belief that the smoke was a signal: in the next moment we decided it couldn't be a signal: that it must be an accident; a hay-barn afire; a farmer clearing land.

One thing was certain. Before we saw the smoke, my companions were images of Death: haggard, slow-moving creatures, tangled of hair

and beard, stooped with hunger. *After* they'd seen the smoke, they stood straighter: their voices were stronger: their eyes less wild and staring.

BY MID-AFTERNOON, while the smoke continued to drift from west to east, the tide was half out and it was apparent to all of us that we'd sight no vessel in the short time remaining.

That night the captain lay across the tent-flap. Neal lay between the two of us, and in the early dark I could feel Neal shaking; perhaps from the cold, but I somehow knew that he was thinking about his father. The captain said, "Neal, roll over on top of me and keep me warm. And Miles: come closer, Miles."

We huddled together.

I could feel rather than hear the soft patting of the captain's hand against Neal's shoulder. Neal's shudderings and swallowings lessened. I suppose we slept.

### *January 2nd, Tuesday*

WHEN, because of bad weather, there was little or nothing to do on Boon Island except pick at that loathsome oakum, or stumble round the island on our eternal patrols, the days sometimes seemed endless because of their monotony and the biting cold.

But there was no monotony, God knows, on that second day of January; by nightfall, I felt as though I had lived years.

The captain, as usual, was first out of the tent, and the tent-flap had no sooner fallen behind him than a sort of hiccuping and gasping came from him. When I crawled out to help him, he was on all fours, pawing feebly at the rocks, as if trying to return to the tent.

"What's the matter?" I asked, frightened by the thought of a captain made helpless at the hour of our greatest need. I got him by the arm and tried to help him up.

He caught me by the shoulders and leaned against me. "Sail," he gasped. "Boat!" His face was contorted into a twisted travesty of a grin. Tears ran down his cheeks; he swung an arm to the westward, turning me in that direction.



There, half-way between us and the shore, a scant three miles away, was a little sloop, bobbing and bowing, curtsying and rocking over the heavy lead-coloured swells, heading straight for the centre of the island's western shore on a cold and sharp north-west wind.

I couldn't believe my eyes. I rubbed them, looked all round the horizon: then looked back at the sloop. I wasn't imagining things! She was a real vessel with a patch at the foot of her jib. A man holding to her mast flapped an arm at his helmsman. My throat constricted: I couldn't speak.

I pulled at the tent-flap and croaked, "Neal!"

He crawled out, white-faced, saw the sloop and made a whimpering sound. The others came out, too. They just stood there, staring at the beautiful little vessel, while tears of which they were unconscious trickled from their eyes and clung in silvery drops to their matted beards.

Captain Dean waved and waved, pointing to the south-east, where the sloop could run close enough to the island to hear our voices; but instead the sloop made for the northern end of the island, came into the wind, and dropped her anchor and jib. She was as far offshore as the island was long.

"Wave her off," Captain Dean told us. "She'll drag her anchor—pile up on a ledge!"

There were three men aboard her—men with rosy faces, warm clothes, fur hats. Well-fed men, quick-moving: symbols of life and salvation.

Captain Dean pointed out to sea, flapped his hands to warn them off. With his arms he made slow circles. He wanted them to pull offshore: to stand off and on until high tide.

Certainly the anchor was dragging, for she was constantly drawing nearer, pushed by those damnable swells out of the north. We groaned with relief when she hoisted her jib and fell off a mile to the eastward, headed north, tacked into the west, and then dodged neatly, lively as a duck, waiting for flood tide.

Under the best of circumstances, waiting can be one of the worst curses that man is called upon to endure—waiting for a loved one, while the mind conjures up visions of injury, disaster, death; waiting apprehensively for a storm to strike: waiting sleeplessly through the night



for the day that seems determined not to come. Never, I thought, as I waited for that sloop to return, would I wittingly add to a man's burdens by keeping anyone waiting.

After what seemed an eternity to all of us, torn by our fears, our nerves a-jangle, the little sloop slipped in to coast back and forth across the southern tip of the island. With each pass she drew closer. We could see she carried no boat; only a bark canoe lashed alongside her cabin. The three men who sailed her eyed us warily: glanced at each other, as if in doubt. They didn't like what they saw, and I couldn't blame them.

The sloop's master brought her into the wind, dropped his jib and spilt the anchor over the bow. The three men ducked under the sloop's boom and studied us again. They looked worried.

"Ship *Nottingham*," Captain Dean shouted. "London to Portsmouth."

We couldn't tell whether or not the three men could hear.

Captain Dean turned to the rest of us and spoke sharply. "I don't dare tell 'em how much we need food. They might not come ashore." To the sloop he shouted again, "Fire! We need fire! Cold! Frozen!" He held his ears: bent over, he hugged himself.

Two of the men unlashed the canoe, lowered it over the side and held it while the third man stepped down into it, knelt in the middle. He pushed off from the sloop with his paddle and headed for the cleft in the rock where we were gathered.

"Remember," the captain warned us, "don't say a word about our meat."

Captain Dean and George White braced themselves at the head of the cleft and caught the canoe as it came rushing in on the slope of a roller. The canoe-man, still clutching his paddle, climbed out over the bow and helped White and Captain Dean carry the canoe up higher, out of harm's way.

"We knew somebody had been cast away, and probably here," he said.

"I'm John Dean," the captain said, "master of the *Nottingham* galley. We went ashore——"

He broke off, looked from the canoe-man to Langman and back again: then asked, "What day is this—sir?"

"This is January second, a Tuesday," the man said. "I'm Richard Nason. Kittery. Part owner of the sloop *Head of Tide*."

"It can't be Tuesday," Langman said. "It must be Wednesday."

Nason looked at him oddly. "Why must it?"

"Because I kept count," Langman said.

Nason turned back to Captain Dean. "Yesterday was Monday—New Year's Day."

Captain Dean nodded. "We went ashore Monday, December eleventh. There was a north-easter blowing."

"You've been on this pile of rocks three weeks?" Nason asked incredulously. His eyes swept over us from head to foot—from our oakum hats, with bits of sea-gull feathers and sea-gull skin woven into them, the oakum mittens on our hands, the oakum wrappings fastened to our shoulders, chests and legs, to the clumsy oakum sheathings of our feet. He shook his head as if he found us incredible.

"Kittery?" Captain Dean asked. "Isn't that on the river opposite Portsmouth?"

"Yes," Nason said, "and I'd better not waste time. We'll have to take word to Portsmouth about you. You need help as much as anyone I ever saw!"

"Yes," Captain Dean said. "We need help. When you send word to Portsmouth, see that Captain Long and Captain Furber are told. They're old friends. You tell 'em I'm John Dean of Twickenham, Jasper Dean's brother."

"Wait a minute," Nason said. "I'll write it down." He fished out a small account book: then stared at us again. "No fire all that time?" he asked. "How could you live?"

"It seemed like a long time," Captain Dean said apologetically. "We built a boat and lost it. Then we built a raft. This boy's father built it."

He put his hand on Neal's shoulder.

Nason cleared his throat. "Oh, yes," he said. "The raft! We thought there'd been two men on it. We thought a lot of men worked to make it. We found it at high-water mark. Under a tree beyond high-water mark there was a man. He got as far as the tree. Then I suppose he lay down and froze."

He shook his head, put his account book back in his pocket, and became suddenly busy. "I'll start a fire for you. Slice up some wood slivers for kindling." He moved towards the tent.

"What colour was the man's hair—the one under the tree?" Captain Dean asked.

"Black," Nason said, "with white streaks."

Captain Dean put his hand on Neal's shoulder.

Nason looked from the captain to Neal. "Was this boy's father—the one who built the raft—on it?"

"Yes," Captain Dean said, "but he had yellow hair."

"That's a shame," Nason said. "I'm sorry."

Neal just nodded, his shoulders back and held high—a fine-looking boy, in spite of his oakum helmet and his outlandish swathings.

"That was quite a thing," Nason said. "Paddling a raft ashore in the dead of winter."

"He wanted to do it," Neal said.

Nason examined him attentively. "We hunted everywhere," he said, "up and down the beaches."

"I saw him in a dream," Neal said. "He got off the raft so that it would be sure to get to shore."

Nason turned to look at the sloop; then at the sky in the south-east.

"Yes," he said slowly. "That would explain it."

"Could I find the place where the raft came ashore?" Neal asked. "I've got to go there."

"I'll take you there myself," Nason said heartily. "You can stay with us. I've got five brothers and four sisters. There's so many Nasons in Kittery that we've worn grooves in the river, sailing up and down it. You come and stay with us: you'll fit right in between Benjamin and William."

Neal looked at him, then at me. For the first time since I had known him, he was on the verge of tears.

NASON made us clear away the oakum on the ground in the centre of the tent for a fire hole, and lay up a circle of rocks. We stacked wood shavings in the centre. Nason fell to his knees, took the flint and steel from his tinder-box—a tin one with a candle ring on the top—and

placed a small piece of charred linen on the slivers. He struck the flint, and the spark ignited the linen; but when he cautiously held the point of a sliver to the flame, it wavered and died.

"Here," he said to the silent, kneeling figures round him, "shred the ends of those slivers." He pulled a sheath-knife from his belt and feathered the end of a sliver.

"Now I'll do what I should have done first," Nason said. "I'll try to light the candle."

He stood the stub of a candle in the candle ring, rested a piece of tinder against the wick, and again struck sparks from the flint. The tinder caught: the wick smoked—and a yellow flame stood up from it!

Nason stacked up the feathered bits of wood, and lit one of them from the candle. The flame spread from one stick to another.

Captain Dean leaned down and caught one of Nason's hands in his. The smoke must have affected my eyes, because I couldn't see for the wetness in them.

Fire! Warmth! Who knows what it's like to be without them? Only animals—and some of us had truly become animals.

Nason looked at the emaciated, bearded faces, accentuated by the flickering light of the fire. "What have you lived on? What have you had to eat?"

"We saved some cheese and meat from the ship," Captain Dean said. "Then we had mussels and a sea-gull and seaweed."

"My God!" Nason said. "Seaweed!" He scrambled from the tent and we followed. "The wind's moving into the south-east," he said. "I don't like it."

The tide was half out, and the breakers were pounding on the uncovered ledges.

"I can't run the risk of launching that canoe where I ran in," Nason said.

Captain Dean agreed. "I think the safest place is round to the north-west. There's a deep cove we can show you. . . ."

When Nason finally stroked his bark canoe out of the cove and went safely aboard the sloop, I looked at the dingy grey of the western sky. The little sloop, now weewawing towards that greyness, was too small and fragile for my peace of mind.

*January 3rd, Wednesday*

RICHARD NASON and Captain Dean had been right in looking askance at that south-east wind, for its gusts grew stronger and stronger: then snow came whirling into the tent. Sometimes the wind pulled the smoke up with it and set the fire glowing. At other times it beat at the blaze with icy fingers, flattening the smoke round us.

What with the snow and the high seas and the heat that Captain Dean gave us, we hardly moved from the tent all day. We took turns stoking the fire, and dozing in its faint glow—a mere breath of nothing to anyone who has known a real fire in a real fire-place, but a bit of heavenly radiance to us who had lived so long in a frigid hell.

We looked, of course, towards shore, but not in hopefulness. No vessel could have approached Boon Island in that abominable storm, and we were afraid, even, to speculate as to when Nason might reach Portsmouth. We knew in our hearts that he and his little sloop, with that unexpected wind to harry them, might never have reached Portsmouth at all.

*January 4th, Thursday*

THE SNOW stopped, the wind dropped, the tent was warm, and we must have slept like logs; for when I woke, we were sitting up, all ten of us, wild-eyed, vaguely conscious that a gun had been fired.

The tide was almost dead low: the sea had fallen: the wind was a light breeze, offshore, so that the tops of the swells had a slick look—and rising and falling on those rollers was a craft so sturdy, so smart, so daring in the way she slipped round those brown ledge-fingers, almost touching them, that I couldn't shout or even speak.

The little vessel was odd-looking. She had a high sharp bow and an even higher sharp stern, and under her boom rested a broad, high-sided skiff with a narrow, flat bottom. There were five men on her deck, one lying out on the short bowsprit watching for ledges, one at her tiller, one reloading the musket that had aroused us, and two wrestling the skiff over the side.

"That's a pink," Captain Dean said in a strangled voice. "Nothing like 'em to nose in and out of a rocky coast." He lowered himself half-way down the seaweed.

The man on the pink's bowsprit jumped up and let go an anchor; then joined those at work on the skiff. The man at the tiller tossed two coils of rope into the skiff: then four men slid her into the water and jumped in. One made fast a rope to the bow: another did the same in the stern, tossing the unattached end of the rope to the man who had held the tiller on the pink.

The man in the skiff's bow stood up, cupped his hands round his mouth and shouted to Captain Dean. His voice carried strongly to us on that gentle but frost-laden land breeze. "The dory's made fast astern. We'll pay out easy. When we're close enough, we'll throw the bow rope ashore. Get some men down there with you and lay on to that bow rope. Hold it taut so that we can't be swamped."

Two of the men in the dory stood up, pushing at oars. They faced in the direction they were rowing, which seemed strange and awkward. It wasn't right for a rower to be able to see where he was going, instead of turning his back to his objective and seeing nothing, as do rowers in England. I wondered why these Americans had to be so different, sailing something called a pink, sharp at both ends: recklessly approaching ledges in a flat-bottomed dory instead of a skiff: standing up to row so as to face forward. . . .

I looked round for someone to help the captain. Only Neal, Langman and White had come from the tent: the four of us joined Captain Dean. When the man in the dory's bow tossed us the rope, we caught it and clumsily took it high up on to solid rock, above the seaweed. The dory, held bow and stern, jerked at the ropes like a fractious horse.

The newcomers picked their way up over the seaweed as we laboriously made the rope fast round a boulder. I never saw such incredulity as was written on their faces. Captain Dean, testing the hitch, looked up at the foremost of those sturdy heaven-sent figures.

"You probably don't remember me," he said. "We'd pretty near lost hope——" His voice broke.

All four men stared at us, brows wrinkled, mouths half open. The man Captain Dean had addressed seemed both horrified and puzzled.

"Nason said I'd find John Dean here," he said. "I'd like to——"

"I'm John Dean," the captain said. "You're Furber." He turned to another. "You're Captain Long. I—I—I——" He sat down suddenly on a boulder, clasped his hands round his middle and rocked himself back and forth.

Long and Furber jumped forward and hoisted him to his feet. Long patted his back. Furber held his upper arm with both hands.

"We caught the outgoing tide as soon as we heard," Furber said. "Nason said to hurry, so we hurried. You'll be all right, John!" He hesitated and asked uncertainly, "You're John Dean of Twickenham?"

"Jasper's brother," Captain Dean said. "I'll be all right when I get away from these damned breakers! Can't seem to hear a thing! Where's Nason?"

"He's in Portsmouth," Furber said. "He ran into a south-east squall and piled up on Kittery Point. Too much of a hurry to get back, I guess. He lost his sloop, but he got word to Colonel Pepperrell, who got word to us. We sail Pepperrell's ships, John."

"We've got gruel aboard the pink, John," Captain Long said. "You'll feel different when you get some gruel into you." He took Captain Dean's arm and steered him towards the dory.

"Take the others first," Captain Dean said. "They're in the tent. Had our first fire last night—breathed a lot of smoke. Tent smells pretty bad. Things weren't easy. I had to stop trying to drive 'em."

"You can't drive 'em if you're human," Captain Furber said.

Captain Dean's voice was suddenly shrill. "Hurry up and help those others. We can't tend this rope all day."

Captain Long, Captain Furber and the two seamen scuttled off towards the tent. Captain Dean rubbed his face with both hands, and examined them as if surprised. "I'd know Furber anywhere. Name of Jethro. Only Jethro I ever saw. Used to keep running into him—Antigua, Halifax. Where was I? Oh yes, he sailed under John Frost. Is John Frost here? Or is it Long?"

I saw his mind was wandering. When I went to help him, he half-turned, put out his hands gropingly and fell heavily.

Neal tried to lift him up. "Let him alone," I said. "Let him rest. He's been through a lot. A rest won't hurt him."

Long, Furber and the two sailors stumbled to us, each one carrying a man on his back.

"The captain had a fall," I told Captain Long. "I think he's a little tired."

"I shouldn't wonder," Captain Long said. "Now look: I'm in command here! Put Dean in the dory at once." He pointed at Neal. "Put him in, too. That's two passengers and two to row."

We stowed the captain in the dory: Neal got in by himself. The rowers faced the pink, and when a roller lifted the dory, they dug in their oars and pushed hard. Captain Furber paid out the bow cable. Aboard the pink the man pulled at the stern rope.

"How many left in the tent?" I asked Captain Long.

"We couldn't see," he said. "We brought out four. Who are they?"

I looked at them, sprawled above the seaweed. They all seemed exactly alike—quadruplets, bearded, foul, horrible-looking.

I couldn't remember what Captain Long had asked me and so shook my head.

Captain Long reached out and slapped my cheek, so to jolt me back to reality. "No offence meant," he said. "Who else is there? Have we got 'em all?"

I counted carefully. "There must be another in the tent. Mellen. That's ten. There were fourteen to begin with."

Captain Furber nudged Captain Long. "The dory's coming back," he said.

They went to the water's edge; when one of the sailors tossed the bow rope ashore, the two captains belayed it round the same boulder we'd used. The rowers climbed out and hurried back to the tent, and Captain Long came to stand beside me. "Nason told us there were twelve: that two were lost on the raft, though only one was found."

"No," I said, "there were fourteen. The cook died of lung complaint. We set him adrift. Then the carpenter died. The men wanted to eat him. We finished him up last night."

Captain Long took me by the shoulder. I saw he once more thought my mind was troubled, and was about to slap me to sensibility again. "I'm all right," I said, pushing his hand away. "You'd have done the same in our place."



Langman crowded up to Captain Long.

"I was against it," he shouted. "I said it was barbarous, unchristian and a sin!"

Captain Long looked hard at Langman. "So you didn't eat him?" he asked.

"I didn't eat him as Chips Bullock," Langman explained earnestly. "I only ate him as beef."

"That's a nice distinction," Captain Long said.

He became suddenly irascible, impatiently lifted Henry Dean, and shouted at Saver, Graystock and Gray. "Get on your feet! Stow yourself in that dory!" He pointed a stubby finger at Langman. "Help 'em if they *need* help; then get in yourself! Don't stand about! All we lack is a capful of wind to be stuck on this damned island ourselves! God knows how you stood it! I couldn't have stood it a week without losing all my anchors!"

His two seamen came back, pushing and pulling at Mellen.

"Get him in! Get him in!" Captain Long shouted. He tapped me on the shoulder and pointed to the south-west. There, coming up fast, were two schooners and a brigantine, all three of them running before the wind.

"Word's got round," Captain Long said. "And that wind has shifted! Pack 'em in! Pack 'em in!"

Five minutes later I was hauled over the side of the pink, her anchor was up, and we were moving to the westward.

THE BRIGANTINE and the two schooners hove to and waited for the pink to come within hailing distance: then cruised along on either side and spoke to us.

"Get 'em all?" they shouted. "Anything we can do?"

Long used his speaking trumpet. "We got 'em all. Ten of 'em. If you beat us in, see there's canoes at Pepperrell's Wharf in Portsmouth. Take word to Dr. Packer. Get barbers. Find Nason and see what he's arranged."

The skippers of the three vessels nodded vigorously. One of them, perched in the ratlines, bawled, "How many days on the island?"

"Twenty-four," Captain Long shouted.

The skipper slid down from the ratlines, and I could see the crews talking and gesticulating. I knew they didn't believe it.

The three vessels sheered away from the pink and drew ahead, as if racing for Portsmouth.

PEPPERRELL'S WHARF was crowded when the pink slid alongside at dusk. It was a mystery to me why so many hundreds had gathered on that wharf to see a few scarecrows, but in spite of the bitter January cold there *were* hundreds of them, men, and women, too. Almost all had lanterns made of pierced tin. They were somehow different from any such throng that might collect in Greenwich. In Greenwich there would have been hang-dog-looking folk among them, slyly seeking pockets to pick. Those of substance would have seemed contemptuous. Almost certainly there would have been some who jeered at our hairiness and raggedness and queer oakum garments.

But those hundreds on Pepperrell's Wharf stood straight, had solidity, and all of them, without exception, were concerned about us. They were compassionate people. When I was helped over the bulwarks and saw all those solicitous eyes, glittering in the light from their upheld lanterns, I couldn't help gulping to think that strangers should be so kind.

NASON came from the crowd to lower me into a canoe with Neal, "You're going to Captain Furber's," he said. "Captain Dean's already gone there." He put his hand on Neal's shoulder. "We're all your friends. You needn't worry about a thing."

The canoe-man took us a short distance down-stream, helped us ashore, pulled his canoe half up the bank, and motioned us to follow him.

"Tell us where it is," I said, "and we'll go there. You don't need to leave your canoe."

"Why not?" he asked.

"Someone might steal it."

He looked baffled: then urged us forward, between two warehouses and across a street to a two-and-a-half-story wooden house. The door of the house was open and before it stood two women and three children, all peering in through the doorway.

Our canoe-man touched one of the women on the shoulder. She stifled a cry and whirled to face him. At the sight of us, she pressed her hand to her lips and shrank back, drawing the children against her skirts.

"What's the matter, ma'am?" the canoe-man asked. "I was told by Captain Nason to bring these people here, orders of Captain Furber, and Captain Dean's already been brought here."

"Oh," the woman said, "he frightened us to death, just the look of him. When he stood here and started to speak to us, we screamed and ran out. He went in. I think he's in the kitchen."

"Well, go on in," the canoe-man said, "and take these two with you. Treat 'em the same way you'd want Captain Furber to be treated if he'd been cast away on Boon Island for a month."

"Only for twenty-four days," Neal said.

Mrs. Furber looked at Neal: looked away, then studied him carefully.

"Only!" she said. "Only twenty-four days! You come in the house, this minute!"

Captain Dean was in the kitchen, as Mrs. Furber had suspected. On the fire he had found an iron kettle filled with beef stew, had forked out pieces of beef and turnips and potatoes, and had covered the top of the kitchen table with them to let them cool. "I'm sorry, ma'am," he said to Mrs. Furber. "When you screamed and ran out, I thought the wise thing to do was to stay here instead of running after you and maybe frightening you even more."

Mrs. Furber's initial horror was passing. "You can't have all that beef and vegetables you've put out on the table," she said sternly. "You'd be ill. And just because you're starved is no reason you shouldn't eat like human beings." She brought a bowl and three plates, forked a moderate amount from the table top to each plate; then put the remainder in the bowl.

"Now," she said, "that's all you can have!"

"Ma'am," Neal said, "I'll ask you to put us in the room where we'll stay. We'd better eat there."

"Well I never!" Mrs. Furber exclaimed.

Neal scratched himself deliberately, first his head: then his arm.

"Well," Mrs. Furber said, "we'll put you in the barn. There's lots

of hay and blankets, and a summer oven. When you're cleaned up, we'll move you to the house."

There was a knock on the door. Mrs. Furber opened it to admit three men—Dr. Packer and two barbers.

The doctor took one look at us, then beckoned us to pick up our plates and follow him. To Mrs. Furber he said, "Bring us hot water as often as you can. And get tubs. If you've only got one, borrow two from the neighbours."

I CAN hear Dr. Packer's voice, after all these years, exclaiming at our sores, our feet.

"It's a miracle," he said over and over. "I've got to send word to Boston! Damp dressings? Oakum? Seaweed? God knows! But it's a miracle, all the same!"

Warmth, blankets, soft hay on which to lie, bathed bodies, shorn heads, shaved faces, white bandages, soothing ointments! I felt as the sailors of Ulysses must have felt, when freed of Circe's spell.

### *The Last Chapter*

I WAKED, the next morning, to the sound of jingling, faint and far off, couldn't remember where I was, and sat up straight on my hay-stuffed mattress, half-frightened by not hearing the unending roaring of those Boon Island breakers.

The jingling sound went on and on.

Captain Dean spoke up. "Sleigh bells! People moving about! Probably be a few of 'em come to see us today. They'll want to know all about us. We'd better decide what to tell 'em about Neal."

"That's simple enough, isn't it?" I asked. "He learned to read and write while working for my father. And my father got to know him because Neal's father was in the Naval Hospital."

"Yes," Captain Dean said. "That's close enough. Are you listening, Neal?"

Politely, Neal said he was.

Just then Captain Furber came banging at the door that led from the barn to the wood-shed, which in turn opened into the kitchen. With

him he carried a kettle of fish chowder, three bowls, a ladle and three spoons.

"Haddock!" Captain Furber said portentously. "The Woman"—and I took The Woman to be Mrs. Furber—"cooks the heads and bones in one kettle, and the onions and potatoes and fish in another. Then she makes a mess of pork scraps, and breaks up some ship's bread, and mixes 'em all up with the liquor from the bones. Every sea-captain in Portsmouth claims his wife makes the best fish chowder in the world, but I'll put The Woman's up against any of 'em. It's the liquor from the heads and the backbones that grows hair on your chest!"

He ladled the stew into the bowls; then discoursed while we rolled that hot and fragrant chowder over our tongues, crunching the pork scraps through the soft and savoury ship's bread, the tender haddock and the melting potatoes.

"The Woman," Captain Furber said, "makes fried pies that would stand a dead Indian right up on his feet. She wanted me to take in a few for you, but Doc Packer said no. There's a couple of nurses coming over and Doc Packer says maybe you can have one fried pie apiece along about four bells. There's been people coming round with stuff already," he added, "but Doc Packer says they can't come in till after he's looked at you."

"What sort of stuff?" Captain Dean asked.

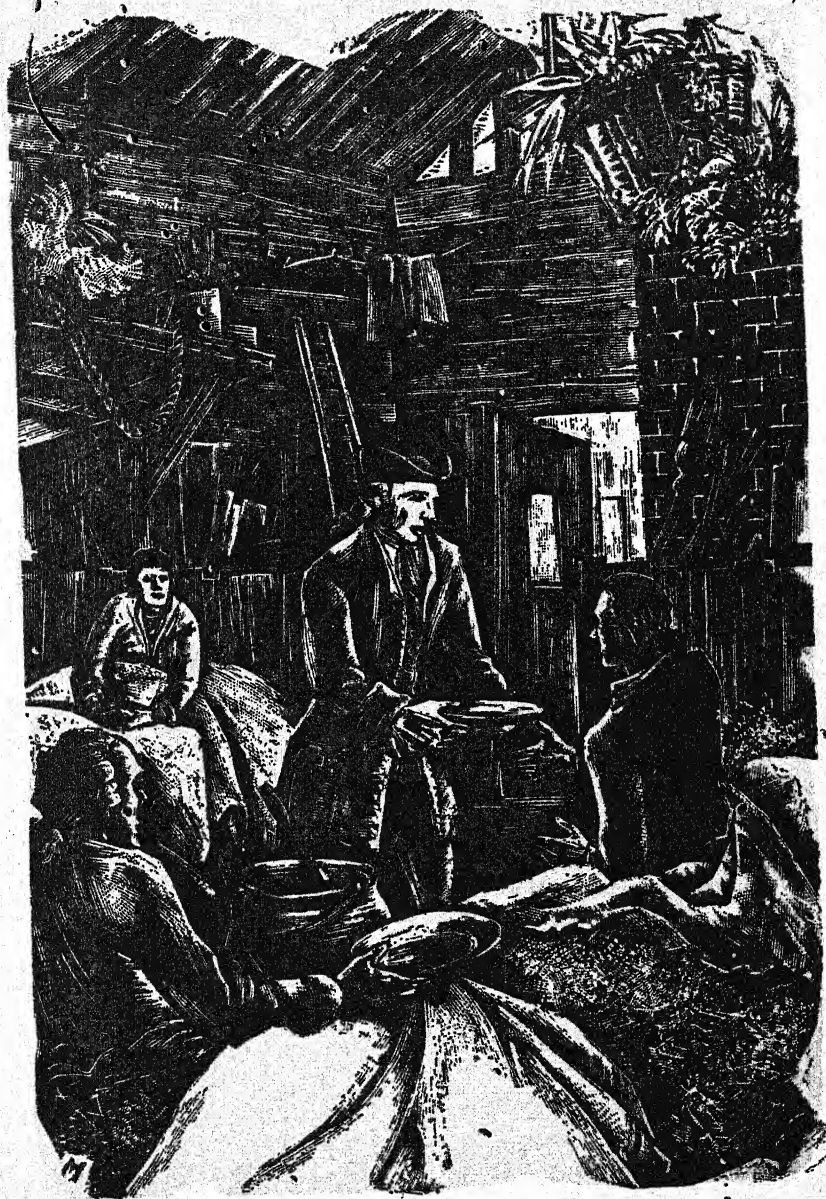
"Oh, knitted small clothes," Captain Furber said. "Linen shirts. Woollen stockings. Big parcel from Mrs. John Brewster—the one that was scalped. Good woman. Got a silver plate in her head to close up the hatchet hole. Hair never grew back, so she wears a wig."

Dr. Packer came in, followed by two women in grey dresses. "Now then," Dr. Packer said to Captain Dean, "we'll have these bandages off. Colonel Pepperrell sent word he wants to see you as soon as you're fit to be seen."

The nurses brought buckets and rags, stoked the fire, swept the barn floor and set up a table for the gifts Captain Furber had mentioned.

"How's my brother?" Dean asked. "And the rest of 'em?"

"Your brother's all right," Dr. Packer said. "He lost toes, the same as you did; but when they fell off, they sort of healed themselves, just like those lizards down in Antigua, that shed their tails if you so much as



look at 'em." He pronounced it Antigga, so I knew he'd sailed there—probably in one of Pepperrell's vessels. "I think I'll move your brother over here later today. I don't think much of the sailors he's with. I tell 'em they can have a certain amount to eat, they eat three times as much."

"Saver and Graystock," the captain said. "I'll be glad to have Henry here where I can keep an eye on him."

The doctor eyed Captain Dean peculiarly. "You've got some others that'll bear watching," he said.

"I know," Captain Dean said. "Langman and Mellen and White."

"If I was you, I wouldn't trust 'em," Dr. Packer said.

The captain snorted. "I don't trust 'em as far as I could throw a whale by the tail."

How LITTLE anyone knows about America! About its insatiable curiosity concerning the welfare of others! About its generous eagerness to help strangers achieve the same health and happiness that its own citizens enjoy! About its limitless resources: its enormous latent strength! And above all, about its friendliness to those who deserve its friendship: its implacable detestation of false men and evil measures!

From my earliest days I had seen, wherever I'd gone in England, beggars of all sorts pleading, imploring alms, food, cast-off clothing; but never had I seen generosity freely offered. Now, in Portsmouth, where beggars were unknown, I saw what I would never have believed, unless I had seen it with my own eyes—an outpouring of all the good things of this earth to strangers, who had suffered adversity during the same storms which had howled round the sheltered homes of their benefactors.

Captain Furber complained and fulminated at the surplus offerings of money, piles of clothing, fur hats, flowered waistcoats, boots and shoes that accumulated in his best room—the room unused, except for funerals and weddings, in the front left corner of every large Portsmouth house.

More people came to see us or call on us than I would have believed lived in Portsmouth. Merchants, sea captains, tavern keepers, King's Councilors, Lieutenant-Governor John Wentworth, Colonel William



Pepperrell—fine men: the finest, barring my father and Captain Dean and Swede Butler, I ever met. Every one of them was solicitous about our welfare, and in a few weeks' time I had more offers of positions than I would have had in England in half a century.

As for Neal, word had gone round concerning the manner of his father's death, and everyone who saw him was instantly seized with the idea of planning his future.

Colonel William Pepperrell and his partner Governor Wentworth came to call on our second day in Portsmouth. Everything, Governor Wentworth said, would be done for us, and at the expense of the Province of New Hampshire. We were entranced by his elegance, his affability, and the attentiveness with which he listened to our answers to his questions.

His companion, Colonel Pepperrell, seemed more remote—more interested in scrutinizing the ceiling than in listening to us.

Then Colonel Pepperrell came again alone. Neal, when the colonel walked in, was sitting at our gift table writing letters of thanks to those who had left their names with their offerings. The colonel went to the table, picked up one of the letters and read it, then waved it exultantly. "Look at that! I read every word of it, easier than print!" He narrowed his eyes at Neal. "Where'd you learn to write?"

Neal stood up. "In Greenwich, sir."

"He's to work for my father," I said, "in law and insurance."

"Law!" Colonel Pepperrell cried. "Quibble, quibble, quibble! That's no life for you, my boy! Here, sit down! Sit down! Dr. Packer said he had to trim off half your foot."

"I don't know how much he took off, sir. It feels no worse than it did before he trimmed it."

"Yes," Colonel Pepperrell said. "I see!"

He looked carelessly at Neal, glanced at Captain Dean and me: then seemed to come to a decision.

He spoke thoughtfully and jerkily, almost as if meditating aloud. "I talked to John Wentworth about you. Twice. Slow man, I am, like folks in Devonshire. Think slowly but make up my mind quickly. Always wanted to go to America, but couldn't make up my mind to go till I was sixteen. Then, I went quickly."



His eyes strayed back to Neal.

"Mustn't wander from subject," he grumbled. "My boy William Junior! He's fourteen, can't write at all. He's got to learn to write, because my other son Andrew's at sea, learning the things a shipowner needs to know. Andrew's delicate. He couldn't have come through Boon Island the way you people did."

He tilted back in his chair and ran his eyes over us, a shrewd, far-seeing old man, wondering, I suspected, whether he could have endured Boon Island.

"I know a little about England," he said. "I was born in Revelstoke, near Plymouth. I didn't like it. Upper classes everywhere protecting themselves from lower classes, and with good reason!" He snorted. "Been thinking a little of going back to Revelstoke: buying a few hundred acres in the country: being upper classes myself."

He glanced at us sharply, as if to get our reactions.

"The thing that stops me is William Junior. I've built a big shipping business. William Junior's got to write letters to me about it in Devonshire, so I can buy books and learn to chase foxes at Revelstoke! Chase foxes! Those fools that chase foxes never kept hens. If they ever had, they'd kill all the foxes before they had a chance to grow up!"

He clucked disparagingly at himself. "Wander, wander from the subject! Now here: we've got no schools. John Wentworth says he's going to build a school with his own money, but he hasn't done it, and William Junior still can't write. Time's getting short!" He pounded the table. "William Junior has got to learn to write, and you, young Butler, have got to learn him."

He leaned forward and fixed Neal with a steely eye.

"Well," Neal said, "I half promised——"

"I know what you half promised!" Colonel Pepperrell said. "You half promised Richard Nason you'd go with him to see where your father was lost! Well, I've had a talk with Richard Nason. He lost his sloop coming back from Boon Island—no fault of his. I've made him captain of one of mine. We'll both of us take you to where we think your father was lost."

At the look on Neal's face he turned suddenly towards Captain Dean and me. "Well, what about it?"

"If I had such an offer," Captain Dean said, "I'd say Boon Island was worth it."

"What about you, Whitworth?" the colonel demanded.

"His father would have been—probably is—mighty grateful," I said.

"Then that's all right," Colonel Pepperrell said comfortably. "We'll see a lot of each other before the two of you are healed up and ready to take one of my ships to Barbados."

Captain Dean drew a deep breath. "I'd feared something like this," he said.

"Feared!" Colonel Pepperrell protested.

"Yes, feared. Feared that I might not be able to take advantage of such an offer. There's something you don't know——"

"You probably mean Langman," the colonel said. "Well, John Wentworth and I know all about Langman. He's jealous because you're getting all the attention—because everybody's stopped going to see him and his two cronies. As soon as he began telling how you purposely ran the *Nottingham* ashore on Boon Island, Portsmouth had a bellyful of Langman. My God, Dean, this is a seafaring town! Do you think *anybody* over the age of three and a half would believe that anyone, for the sake of *any* amount of insurance, would run a vessel on Boon Island in a north-easter? And in the dead of winter? Pish! Portsmouth doesn't want people like Langman and his fellow conspirators about. They were quartered in the Motley house, but the Motleys have ordered them out."

"Colonel," I said, "we know people like yourselves and these wonderful friends we've made in Portsmouth wouldn't believe Langman; but people in England aren't like that. Those round the docks believe anything they hear about people of property or position. They're too ignorant to investigate—to find out the truth. If Langman has started telling his lies, he'll keep straight on. He'll tell them in England; he might even have them printed. Then the captain will have to tell his own story, with two witnesses. In all likelihood Langman will drag my father into it, for my father handled Captain Dean's insurance. We're mighty grateful to you, Colonel, but I'm afraid this means that Captain Dean and Henry Dean and I must go back to England."

Colonel Pepperrell glowered at us, his eyes belying the thin line of his

lips. "I never go back on my word," he said. "There'll always be room for the Deans and Miles Whitworth in the Pepperrell fleet—and when your feet are healed, we want all of you at Kittery Point, so you can see Neal Butler in the surroundings I hope he'll always call his home."

OUR WORST fears were justified when, a month later, Colonel Pepperrell notified us that Langman, Mellen and White were to appear before his friend Samuel Penhallow, a Justice of the Peace, to take oath that Captain Dean had deliberately run the *Nottingham* ashore and that Captain Dean had in addition treated Langman in a barbarous and inhumane manner..

The colonel went with us to Justice Penhallow's residence on the following day to hear Langman, Mellen and White swear to the truth of a tale that put anything in the fairy tales of Edmund Spenser to shame.

Justice Penhallow looked up at Langman before writing his signature. He didn't say a word: he didn't need to. He just looked. Then he signed the paper, and without a word stood up and opened the door for Langman, White and Mellen to go out.

He came back and shook hands with all of us. "There's nothing to be done in a case like that," he said. "If you could spare the time and the money, you could prosecute Langman for perjury, but you'd do yourself more harm than good. That man would feel honoured to be noticed, but he'd never be noticed by anyone worthy of the name of mariner."

COLONEL PEPPERRELL had arranged for Captain Dean, Henry Dean and myself to sail from Pepperrell's Cove on one of his brigantines. We took our departure on a soft April morning, with the south-east breeze bringing us the sweet Maine odours of young willows, damp beaches and newly turned earth.

"If it hadn't been for Langman and his lies," the colonel told me disgustedly, "you and Captain Dean would be working for me today! John Wentworth wanted me to provide Langman and his cronies with passage on this same brigantine, and at government expense. I'd see 'em in hell first! Let the British Navy take charge of Langman and his

two dog-fish. All three of 'em need a taste of the cat every day or two just to remind 'em to be human!"

The colonel's son William and Neal Butler stood beside me on the wharf.

"Seems to me," the colonel said severely to his son, "you'd be better off up at the house, learning to write."

"Yes, sir," Neal said, "but we thought you wouldn't mind if we said a final word to Miles about coming back. Also I wanted to tell him something."

"Well, go ahead and tell him," the colonel said.

"I wanted to tell him that some day I'd try to be worthy of what's been done for me—for us—here."

The colonel looked from Captain Dean and me to Neal and William. He cleared his throat.

"Why," he said, "that's all right. Under the circumstances, both of you can have the day off."

On the shore behind the colonel and Neal and William stood half the population of Kittery Point, studiously scanning the cloudless sky, as if they had found themselves near the wharf purely by accident. By now I had come to know these Maine people a little, and I suspected why they were there. They wanted us to know they were resentful of any person who expected them to believe that Captain Dean would have wrecked a ship on Boon Island in a December north-easter. Under most conditions they were patient; but when aroused, they took steps.

I tried to speak, but couldn't. The Colonel and Neal had us by the arms, urging and helping us into the longboat. There was a fluttering of hands and a babel of cries. The oars rattled in the thole-pins; the gulls squalled and squealed overhead; the shore seemed misty and the Braveboat hills wavered a little.

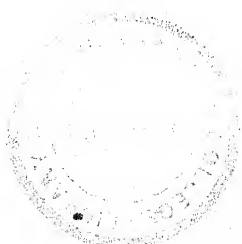
Well, who could tell? God, if we're fortunate, is good to us. How many of us have our Boon Islands? And how many have our Langmans?

But doesn't each one of us have an inner America on which in youth his heart is set; and if—because of age, or greed, or weakness of will, or circumstances beyond his poor control—it escapes him, his life, to my way of thinking, has been wasted.

*Postscript*

IN 1745 CAPTAIN MOSES BUTLER of Kittery served under Lieutenant-General William Pepperrell in the attack on the French fortress of Louisburg on Cape Breton. He led the 7th Company, and fought with distinction at the taking of the Royal Battery, the Island Battery, and in scouting attacks on the French and Indians in the wilderness to the westward. The fortress surrendered on June 17th, 1745, and there was great rejoicing in Kittery, York, Berwick, Wells, Arundel, Biddeford, Falmouth and places farther to the eastward. General William Pepperrell was knighted. Captain Butler married Mercy Wentworth. His daughter married Joshua Nason of Arundel.

CAPTAIN JOHN DEAN so successfully defended himself against Langman's attacks that he was made His Majesty's Consul for the Ports of Flanders, residing at Ostend, and held his post for many years.





*Kenneth Roberts*

THE DISTINGUISHED AUTHOR, Kenneth Roberts, who died last year at the age of seventy-one, was born in Kennebunk, Maine, only a few miles away from Boon Island and its lighthouse.

He started his literary career as a humorous writer on the *Boston Post* and the weeklies *Life* and *Puck*, and continued to work simultaneously for all three until the First World War, when he joined the U.S. Siberian Expeditionary Force. After the war he became a roving correspondent for *The Saturday Evening Post*, but soon gave up journalism in order to devote all his time to novel writing. The first of his great series of historical novels, *Arundel*, was published in 1929, and he was soon known as the most learned historian among American novelists—and the foremost novelist among American historians.

His books, which include *Oliver Wiswell*, *Rabble in Arms*, *Lydia Bailey*, and *Northwest Passage*, have been published in many countries, and in 1957 the Pulitzer Prize jury gave him a special award for his historical novels, the first time this jury has departed from its usual practice of singling out individual books to honour the body of an author's work as a whole.